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A RATIONAL MARRIAGE



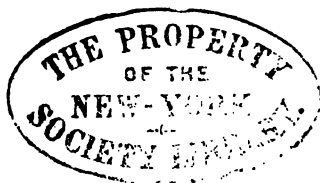
A RATIONAL MARRIAGE

F. M. C. Lean.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT

Author of "Love's Conflict," "Her Lord and Master," etc., etc.



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A Rational Marriage

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CHAPTER I.

THE modern commonplace Bayswater wedding was over. The gaping, dirty crowd which had hung about the front door of Mrs. Ponsonby's house for an hour, had had the gratification of seeing the bridegroom, looking very conscious and uncomfortable in a suit of brand-new clothes, hand the bride, gowned as though she were going to a *fête champêtre*, into the hired carriage with its pair of gray horses and its bouquettèd coachman ; a shower of rice and old shoes had heralded their departure, and now the wedding guests had nothing left to do but to discuss the event, wander about the empty rooms, and review for the twentieth time the cosies, sofa cushions, biscuit-boxes, card-cases and similar useless articles with which the drawing-room table was piled. Mrs. Ponsonby, who had been slaving to get things ready for the ceremony for the last three days, heartily wished now that it was concluded,

that her guests would all go home and leave her to take a little repose ; whilst for their parts the guests wished they had not so hurried over the wedding breakfast, or that they could go through it again ; three o'clock had not yet struck and they had the whole afternoon before them in which to do nothing. They chattered about the loveliness of the bride and the self-possession of the bridegroom and the handsome gifts he had made her ; but had it not been for their hostess's presence, they would have yawned. Indeed, Joan Trevor, who was sitting lightly on the open window-sill, *did* yawn, and that palpably. She was a very different-looking figure from most of the young ladies assembled there, but a very striking figure nevertheless. Her age was two and twenty, and she bore a grave and decided expression, unusual in one so young. Her dark eyes were full of feeling, which the cynical little smile which flitted about her mouth, seemed to contradict. Her abundant hair was twisted into a huge knot at the nape of her neck, contrasting vividly with the white throat which showed beneath it. She was handsome ; but it was not a face that attracted one at first sight. She dressed, too, unlike other girls, although no one could ever say she looked unfashionable. On the present occasion, whilst her contemporaries were robed in the palest shades of pink and blue and saffron,

and much be-frilled and be-furbelowed with lace and chiffon, Joan Trevor was wearing a tailor-made suit of pale gray, with a white waistcoat and tie ; and an Alpine hat upon her head adorned with an eagle's feather. A very suitable costume, the other girls said, for the morning or the seaside, but not the thing to appear in at a wedding. But Miss Trevor was not like other young women of her time. She yawned palpably, as has been said before, and a gusher near her took her to task at once.

"Oh, Miss Trevor, surely you are not tired ! Wasn't it a charming sight?"

"Very charming ! Particularly the bride's white satin dress at eleven o'clock in the morning with the sun streaming on her bare neck and shoulders and the bridegroom's new frock coat, which seemed too tight for him everywhere !"

"Are you laughing ? You are so queer, I never know whether to take you in earnest !"

"Laughing ? Of course not ! Don't you agree with me that marriage is a very solemn institution, and that eating jellies and creams and the richest of wedding cakes, and drinking champagne at one o'clock in the day as a species of thank-offering after it, is much on a par with the sacrifices that were made of old on any religious occasion ?"

"Oh, now, I'm sure you're laughing, Miss Trevor ! Mr. O'Donnell, do come and call

Miss Trevor to order ! She turns everything into ridicule !”

“Not everything,” replied Joan ; “only folly and self-glorification and throwing away money for the sake of display and the gratification of a lot of people who will not thank you for it ! Mr. O'Donnell thinks as I do upon the matter, don't you ?” she continued, turning to a little man who had taken up a position beside her.

He was essentially a little man, not being more than five foot seven in height, and perhaps on this account, added to his abnormally sweet disposition, Lawrence O'Donnell, or “Larrikins,” as he was popularly called, was the pet of the Bohemian world. A smart journalist by profession, and one who had traveled much and observed more, Larrikins was a thorough man of the world, but who had yet preserved his simplicity and purity of feeling, and who was as straight as a die in all things. He was not handsome, but he had what the women termed “a sweet face,” with wide-open blue eyes as clear and honest as a child's, and a sensitive mouth that was ready to sympathize with all human trouble and never spoke harshly of a single creature. These qualities joined to his undoubted intellect and *savoir faire*, made Larrikins an universal favorite, and he had been a staunch friend of Joan Trevor's for some time. When

she appealed to him on the present occasion, he raised his eyes to hers with a smile, and answered—

“Perhaps I do ; but I don’t think I should be brave enough to say so !”

“That’s nonsense !” replied Joan, decidedly. “When I think a thing I say it !”

“But I thought Cecily Ponsonby was such a friend of yours,” interposed the gusher, dubiously.

“Did you ? We have been acquainted for some years, and I like her very much, but she knows my sentiments on the subject of marriage ceremonies as well as I do myself. But women like these displays. I have heard a girl say she would not care to be married at all unless she could wear white satin and orange blossoms. *They* were the first things in her consideration. The marriage came second. However, so long as women marry men they have known for only two months, as Cecily has known Captain Crosbie, I suppose the dress will come first. They know more about that than they do about their husbands.”

“Oh, dear ! Oh, dear !” cried the gusher, turning away. “I never *do* know if you are in fun or in earnest !”

“But *I* do,” whispered Larry O’Donnell in her ear ; “and I was surprised to see you here, Miss Trevor ! What made you come ?”

“My natural amiability ! I was pressed to

see the interesting ceremony, so I begged a day off from duty! But what made *you* come, Brother Smut!"

O'Donnell tapped his breast-pocket where his memo. book lay.

"Business!" he answered curtly. "They want it in the *Queen*."

"Oh, you time-server! I'm glad I'm not a journalist! All things to all men! My conscience is, at all events, free of offense!"

"Oh, I'm not going to tell any tarradiddles about it, never you fear;" said her friend, "only describe the dresses, and so on! Can't you help me a bit? Now, that lady dressed in white and green. What is her gown made of?"

"Chintz," said Joan, mischievously.

"And the one in brown?"

"Jaconet!"

"Ah, you're chaffing! I know better than that! How soon are you going home?"

"As soon as I can decently get away!"

"May I come with you?"

"What for, in the name of goodness!"

Larry looked half ashamed of himself.

"Only for a chat and a cup of tea! I'm thirsty; I want a cup of tea dreadfully."

"Well, then you may come, if you promise not to stay too long. I have work to do this evening!"

"What work?"

"What business is that of yours? Some for Lord Mauleverer!"

"I don't believe it!"

"You're awfully rude! I won't give you that cup of tea if you speak like that!"

"Peccavi! I repent! I apologize! But what work is it?"

"Talk of female curiosity! It's nothing compared to a man on the trail! But I shall not pander to it, so spare your breath, Mr. O'Donnell!"

"There was reason in the question! I have been wondering if you would have time in the evenings to execute a little job for me!"

"What is it? My curiosity is lawful when it comes to a 'job'."

"I want a bit of type-writing done—some three hundred pages! They wouldn't take you very long to do—say a week!"

"Three hundred pages! A book! Oh, Larry, now I *am* curious! Is it a fact? Is it your own? I *am* glad! You should have done it years ago!"

"Stop a minute, you female race-horse! There's nothing to be glad about! It's the greatest rubbish possible! That's why I daren't confide it to any eyes less discreet than your own."

"I don't believe you! It will be very good indeed! It will make your fortune! Oh, do let's get home, and tell me all about it!"

Whereupon Miss Trevor approached her hostess with the sweetest of smiles, and pleading urgent business, took her leave with many congratulations on the happy event of the day, followed by the smiling Larry.

"Oh, you arch hypocrite!" he exclaimed, as soon as they found themselves in the Park.

"I know I am, Larry; but what can one do? The wretched woman has married her daughter, which she has been trying to do ever since the girl was marriageable, and one cannot tell her that it will only add one more to the formidable list of failures that are sanctioned by Mother Church every year!"

"But why should it be a failure? They are very fond of each other, aren't they?"

It was a warm day in May and the friends had subsided on a seat under the trees by this time, and were thoroughly enjoying themselves. At Larry's last question, Joan tossed her head.

"Fond! Yes, I suppose they are; as fond as people can be who have been acquainted for two months and engaged to be married for one! But what does that amount to? What can Cecily know of Captain Crosbie, or he of her? They will now begin to find out! Men might just as well buy their wives in a sack as they do somewhere in the East, as marry them blindfold as they do in this Christian country."

"But is it not always somewhat of a lottery?"

"It should not be! The ancient Romans were wiser who took their wives on trial for a year and did not legalize the union unless they found them suitable! Now, don't begin to argue out the matter on the score of society and the protection of women, and the legitimacy of children, please!" continued Joan, seeing that her companion was about to reply. "I know it all by heart, and that there is no remedy—unless, indeed, we abolish marriage altogether!"

"*That* would never answer!" said O'Donnell, with a grimace.

"And, pray, why not?" inquired Joan. "The society of men and women is not only very pleasant, but absolutely necessary to one another—I admit that—but why can't we enjoy our mutual friendship without craving after the sickly sentimentality of love—after kisses and hand-squeezing, and mutual flattery and folly! The mere thought of it disgusts me!"

"But it is Nature, after all?" pleaded Larry.

"And what are we placed on this earth for, unless it is to subdue Nature, I should like to know! What are lovers ever good for, but to dawdle about and 'spoon' each other! Were our intellects given us for no better purpose than to be emasculated by such folly?"

It's all very well, perhaps, for people like Captain Crosbie and Cecily, who haven't much brains between the two (for which reason they will tire of each other all the sooner); but sensible, practical persons like you and me——"

"Well, what of you and me?"

"We are happy enough, you see, in our friendship! We can meet as often as we feel inclined and share each other's pleasures and help each other in our work. What on earth can people want more? And now about this book of yours, Larry! Tell me the subject and all about it!"

But Larrikins' spirits seemed suddenly to have gone down to zero. He put aside the subject of the book at once.

"No, Joan," he answered; "let us leave that till after tea. I am going to put you in a hansom now, and take you home, and if I may stay a little time, we will discuss the question!"

"Stay all the evening, if you like," answered the girl, in a *bon camarade* fashion, "I was only joking about my work: and would rather talk over yours."

In a short time the friends had reached Miss Trevor's flat, which was situated in Chelsea. It was a tiny place, consisting of four rooms; but they were decorated with all the taste of a gentlewoman. As they entered

the little sitting-room, Joan excused herself for a few minutes whilst she changed her walking costume, and then entering the tiny kitchen (where she made the kettle of water boil over the gas stove) she laid the tea-things and brought out the bread and butter and cake, until O'Donnell felt ashamed that she should wait upon his comfort thus.

"Do you always do such duties for yourself?" he inquired, after he had made several awkward attempts to help her, and she had ordered him to sit down and wait till his tea was ready.

"Always!" replied the young woman as she filled the teapot.

"But—but isn't it rather irksome at times? Don't you long for—for company—some one to assist you?"

"Never!" was the resolute reply. "I only breakfast and take tea here as a rule, you know! My bedmaker comes in of a morning whilst I am away and cleans and tidies up, and I invariably dine out. It would interfere too much with my work to return home for dinner!"

"It strikes me that Lord Mauleverer works you very hard?"

"Not a bit of it! He pays me a good salary, and I should be sorry not to earn it! There is no end of work to be done, what with his quotations, and his Latin and French

sentences—the dear old boy is a shockingly bad linguist—and his Parliamentary speeches which I take down in shorthand and type out for him afterwards (and between you and me, Larry, have considerably to correct and improve into the bargain), so that my days are pretty well filled up, and I am glad to have my little nest to come back to for tea and supper ! ”

“ You never will come out to supper with me ! ” interposed Larry, in a tone of discontent.

“ Oh yes, I will—some day, when I am not so busy ! ” replied Joan, cheerfully. “ But you have quite enough to do with your money, my friend, without spending it on suppers for me ! ”

“ What nonsense ! You are always alluding to my poverty, as if I hadn't a very fair income as well as yourself ! I can make my five hundred a year easily, Miss Trevor ! ”

“ Perhaps ; but you never save anything against old age or sickness, so that it isn't much good to you. I wish you *would* save, Larry ! You're very young still—what is your age ? ”

“ Young indeed ! ” with all the eagerness of a young man to make himself out old. I don't know what you call *young*—I was twenty-seven on my last birthday ! ”

“ Were you indeed ? You ought to have

more sense for that age. I thought you were about eighteen !”

“Eighteen ! You say it to tease me ! Why, I’m seriously thinking of getting married !”

The girl’s dark eyes opened to their widest extent in her surprise.

“Oh no ! For Heaven’s sake, don’t do that !” she cried.

“I can’t think what your great objection is to marriage, Joan,” he said.

“Only that I have seen too much of it ! What is marriage, as a rule ? A few months of kissing and spooning, to be followed by years of mutual indifference, if not dislike ! And you are too good for that, Larry ! It would kill all your light-heartedness and youthful spirits. You would no longer care for your club friends, or to go traveling in search of new adventures, or for any other of the spree that now you delight in—you would not be *allowed* to join in them, or if you were, you would no longer have the means. Marriage is a horribly expensive luxury, Larry, and you will find yourself tied down to the side of some stupid owl of a girl for the rest of your life !”

“Need she necessarily be stupid ?” asked Larry.

“She is bound to be, if she marries *you*—with your wild life and your lavish expenditure of money—that is, if she knows you as you are, and if she doesn’t know you, what a pig in a

poke you may buy ! Oh, Larry, my friend, don't marry ! ”

“ I won't buy a pig in a poke ! ” said Larry, thoughtfully. “ There is only one woman in all the wide world that I would marry, Joan—and that is *you* ! ”

“ *Me ? Marry me ?* ” cried Joan, with her face aflame. “ Oh, nonsense ! Then you will remain a bachelor all your life ! I am never going to marry—I *can't* ! ”

“ Can't ? Why not ? ”

“ Because of my grandfather ! Have I never told you about my grandfather, and the reason why I live here by myself ? ”

“ Never ! I thought it was your choice to do so. ”

“ So it was ; but I hardly chose it voluntarily ! The fact is, my grandfather, General Steele, had two daughters, his only children, and they both married unhappily. My mother fell in love with my father, then a young lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and the first time they were separated after their marriage, he was lost at sea, and she returned on her father's hands with me in her arms. Have I ever shown you the portrait of my dear daddy,” said Joan, suddenly, drawing a locket from her dress and displaying the portrait of a very young man. “ Isn't he a darling ? I wish I had known him ; but he lies ‘ five fathoms deep,’ and all I have left of him is this. ”

She kissed the locket before she put it away again, and O'Donnell thought how strange it seemed to see a young woman of two and twenty revering the likeness of a father who had not probably reached her own age.

"Then," she resumed, after a pause, "my aunt Clara was still more unfortunate. She married a Mr. James, an artist, and eloped from him with some one else, after which calamity Mr. James also eloped to America, sending my cousin Amelia as a parting present to my grandfather, who had thus two female orphans left on his hands, for my poor mother died when I was four years old. It was rather hard lines for the old gentleman, wasn't it?"

"But he has plenty of money, has he not?"

"Oh, heaps! He inherited it from his mother. His place in Warwickshire, Belstone Castle, is a magnificent property—so is his house in Queen's Gate L. The old boy is rolling in money."

"And you are—here!" said Larry, looking round the little room.

"Yes; because I would go out in the world and earn my living! You see, I think mother's death and Aunt Clara's misconduct rather soured the old man and turned him against matrimony altogether—I dare say my late revered grandmother combed his hair pretty freely for him, too; but that is only surmise on my part and not history—so he declared

that if either my cousin Amelia (I call her 'Mealy' for short, because she is so mealy-mouthed) or I ever perpetrated marriage, he would cut us off without even the historical shilling, and you bet we're not going to run the risk of that!"

"You prefer money, then, to happiness?" said Larry, sentimentally.

"No! But I've never seen happiness without money—and in this world of civilization and afternoon teas, it is impossible to have it! So I am bound to remain 'in maiden meditation, fancy free' till grandfather is good enough to hop off the twig!"

"And how old is General Steele?"

"Oh, you fortune-hunter!" cried Joan. "Quite a youth, unfortunately! About seventy-five, and as hale and hearty as you are—perhaps a little more so."

"How I wish you wouldn't joke on the subject," said Larry, who was looking very downcast.

"How would you have me take it?—sit down and cry? But putting all my grandfather's threats out of the question, I would never marry a man who had not an assured income; marriage is a risky enough matter, without having poverty to fall back upon when all else fails."

"I see you do not trust me—or my affection for you," said her friend.

"I do not trust any man—after he's married! I have seen too much of them. I have known young men desert good-looking and refined wives for the sake of some low music-hall immorality! You remember the case of Charlie Anstey and Cora Evangeline last year! Who could trust the sex after that?"

"All men are not cads!" grumbled Larry.

"You call your friends 'cads' when they behave badly to their wives; but you put a different complexion on the matter when it happens to yourselves. Besides, Larry, marriage itself is responsible for half these scandals. There is too much familiarity, too much uxoriousness, too much of the fettering business about it, not to make its victims long to jump over the traces. They are so soon sick of one another. Now, if it could be conducted on a rational plane——"

"What do you mean by a rational plane?" interrupted her companion.

"Just what I say! If people want to be married, to have a license for being the closest of friends, well, let them—but why in the name of goodness should they alter all their lives on that account—give up their ambitions, their fancies, their friends, and settle down in the same house to bore each other from morning till night!"

"How could they marry without living together?"

"Very well indeed ! Now, for instance, if I were married—which I am not such a fool as to contemplate—why should I not continue to occupy my own little flat, and to be secretary to Lord Mauleverer, and generally to look after myself, whilst my husband—ugh ! what a horrible idea !—would do the same."

"A nice sort of a marriage !" said Larry, shrugging his shoulders.

"You're quite right, my dear boy, a very nice sort of a marriage ! Think how pleasant it would be, after knocking about the Strand all day, to have a comfortable little room to come to and have your afternoon tea, and a cheerful wife full of news to pour it out for you, instead of a woman who had been bored to extinction with housekeeping during your absence and had nothing but complaints of her servants to amuse you with. Then what a little excitement would hover round the chances whether you would come or not ; how pleasant the secret outings in the evenings, with a little supper perhaps to follow ; and how nice to be able to reckon up your liabilities without including the item of your wife's bills for millinery. Following my plan, men and women would remain friends to the very end. They wouldn't tire so soon of one another. A trip to Paris would be a honeymoon for them each time it occurred. And then, if you were sick or sorry, you would

always feel that you had a home to creep to—a shelter from the outside world—a——”

“Then I might come to your flat as often as I liked,” interposed Larrikins.

“You !” exclaimed Joan ; “ good gracious ! who was talking of you ? I was only depicting a rational marriage for your edification. I bet it would last twice as long as the ordinary ones. You male creatures get so soon tired of your possessions. A little doubt and uncertainty—to have to take a little trouble to find out if your wife would be at home, or willing to receive you, or had got hold of some nicer fellow than yourself, would prove a panacea against infidelity. Don’t you agree with me ? ”

“ Not a bit,” said Mr. O’Donnell ; “ your plan would do away with all the good or the meaning of marriage. What a man wants is a woman always ready to welcome him, and a home which is his very own from cellar to garret, and over the threshold of which no one can cross without his permission.”

“ Exactly !—a very pleasant idea for the man when he wants rest and quiet and attention ; but what about the woman who has to remain at home to await his coming, and to give up half her own friends at his bidding ? However, have it your own way, Larry ; but I shall not follow your example for one. And

now, about the manuscript. Whilst we have been wasting our time over this rubbish, I have been longing to tell you how glad I am to think that you are going to do something big at last ! ”

“ Don’t raise your expectations, Joan. I’m afraid, on the contrary, that it is very little. But I’ve been thinking of jotting down a few ideas on paper for a long time, and having done so, I should like to have your opinion, which I suppose you will be able to make as you type it out.”

“ Certainly—and I shall take great interest in making it.”

“ And corrections into the bargain ? ”

“ It is not likely to require any of those at *my* hand.”

“ It will, I am certain ; and I shall be very much obliged for any suggestions. You are much cleverer than I am, Joan.”

“ Do you think so ?—I don’t. But I’m very determined, which passes sometimes for knowledge. When my grandfather went on nig-nagging at Mealy and me all day, just as if we had been his wives, and I declared I would leave his house and earn my own living sooner than submit to his nonsense any longer, he *dared* me to do it—so I did, and I verily believe the old boy admires me for my pluck. He comes to see me very often, and generally leaves a bank-note behind him—that’s more

than he does for Mealy, though she waits on him, hand and foot. I think she and Aunt Eliza fancy that she will be grandfather's heiress ; but I know better. So long as grandfather catches no men about my flat I stand a better chance than she does. But it's a case of ' Paws off, Pompey ! ' when *his* step comes up the stair."

" You had better look out for a millionaire, then you'll be independent of grandpapa," said Larry, sulkily, as he rose to go.

" That's just what I'm doing—a millionaire and a settlement. If you run against one, Larry, in the course of your wanderings, you might let a fellow know ! "

" Good-by," replied O'Donnell, without noticing her words. " I will send you the manuscript to-night ! When will it be finished ? "

" I can't tell till I've seen it ! A week, perhaps. Call in three or four days, and I'll let you know for certain ! "

" Thank you ! Good evening ! " and Larikins went down the narrow staircase feeling about as low as he had ever done in his life. He was such a merry little cricket, as a rule ; but his heart was very much set on Joan Trevor, and his conversation with her had half killed all his hopes. She was such a dear girl too, he told himself, such a charming bright companion ; so clever and determined

and practical ; just the wife he could have worshiped ; but to live apart, - to have separate establishments and see her running round town with any other man who chose to be polite to her—bah ! it was not to be thought of ! *His* wife must be all his own ; as much his property as his hair-brush or his razor ; and he must be the master in all things ! Joan's idea was absurd ; born of her independent spirit which refused submission to any one. But she would find it wouldn't work ; she would have to give in to the usual customs of society, when she loved any one ; but that was the hitch—she didn't love any one, she had made it plain enough—and Larry had to be called to order several times that evening by his boon companions for having sunk into a brown study and failed to appreciate the jests that were going on around him as he should have done.

And Joan Trevor was not very lively after he had left her, either. The little flat looked rather bare and empty when Larry's presence was withdrawn, and she did not attack her evening's work very briskly. She told herself more than once that she wished he had not introduced such a worn-out subject as marriage ; it was all because they had been so foolish as to attend that vulgar, brazen ceremony of the morning—he knew how she despised all such flummery and ostentation

and self-display—she would sooner never be married at all than make such an exhibition of herself ! But still, she wished she had not spoken so decidedly to him—she would be sorry to wound his sensitive, affectionate little heart. Larry was a dear little man—she really was fond of him—only, she could never surrender her liberty of thought and action for any man and settle down in a Notting Hill semi-detached villa, attending for the rest of her days to squalling brats and half-trained servants. She made an awful face at the very thought of it. Larry was sweet—there was no denying that, but Larry, joined to babies and greasy mutton and washing done at home, was not to be thought of. Besides, though he was very clever, even brilliant, and a smart writer and conversationalist, he lived from hand to mouth ; a stroke of sickness, or a change of editors might throw him out of work any day, and where was the use of talking about five hundred a year under such circumstances. No, she was right ! People had no business to marry unless their income was assured ; otherwise a dual establishment became a game of chance ; a speculation ; a terrible risk, especially when it involved the well-being of others who could not work for themselves. He was a dear boy, but he was a little fool ! How glad she felt to remember that she had sense enough for the two.

CHAPTER II.

MR. O'DONNELL'S manuscript arrived by the next day's post, and as soon as Joan's secretarial duties permitted her, she proceeded to peruse it, with mingled curiosity and interest. A cursory glance at the close writing, made her decide that it would form a volume of some three hundred and sixty printed pages. She was becoming versed in such matters. Her hours in the service of Lord Mauleverer were from eleven to four, and she was accustomed to augment her small income by typing manuscripts for a circle of friends in the evenings. So she anticipated some pleasure from making herself acquainted with Larry's composition. A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind, and Joan had a little secret of her own, which as yet she had not dared to confide to any one. *She* also had conceived and was producing a cherished child of her brain—a novel which she wrote in leisure moments, and in which she was trying to depict the awful effects of a domestic tragedy which she had met in real life—where the ruin of a family and the misery of a husband and

children were brought about by the wife and mother contracting the fatal habit of inebriety. This is, unfortunately, a common case in modern society, and Joan had thought over the subject much, and tried hard not to exaggerate it ; but to trace its cause and effect from the beginning to the end, and show how it may be encouraged by the cowardice, or carelessness of those who surround the victim, and have the right to remonstrate with, or to control her. She was not a conceited girl, and did not think much of her own work ; but she had familiarized herself with her subject, and thought if it were likely to do good, that she would write it all over again, sooner than miss the opportunity of being some good to her fellow-creatures. After which, her dismay and disappointment may be imagined when she found, on dipping into Larry O'Donnell's manuscript, that his story was written on precisely the same lines. And written in so much better a style than her own into the bargain. In the midst of her appalling discovery, she could not help noticing how boldly and tersely he wrote ; how incisive were his sentences ; how true his metaphors ; and how graphically he brought the various scenes and portraits before the reader's eyes. Joan was too broad-minded and generous not to admire this much finer exposition of a subject which she thought she had made her own,

nor to acknowledge that it was double the value of what she had attempted to do. She was on the point of destroying her own manuscript on the spot ; but her common sense showed her that it would still serve the purposes of education in the art of literature, if it never saw the light, which of course, after Larry O'Donnell's, she could never wish it to do. She set to work, therefore, to type-write the latter for its author, and had done a good part of it on the third day after she had received it, when O'Donnell walked into her flat to see how she was getting on.

"You said I might come, you know," he said in apology, "in three or four days, to hear something of your opinion on my 'rot.'"

"I know I did!" replied the girl, cheerfully; "but I hope you will not think I should have got on faster with it. The fact is, I have only had two evenings on which to work, and I found it so interesting that I spent some time in reading it. But there are your first six chapters! How do they look in print?"

"Beautiful!" said Larry, turning over the neatly typed pages. "And it is good news to hear you like it, Joan. I have a great opinion of your literary judgment."

"Because I admire your essays," replied Joan, laughing; "and it is the essayic style of your present composition that I like, Larry.

It is so much above the common. As to the subject-matter, I have a crow to pluck with you !”

“Why? Is it too revolting for everyday reading?”

“Oh no! You have treated it very delicately. But the fact is, I have been engaged on a novel for the last three months, and, unfortunately, I had hit on the very same story, at least, in the main particulars. I fancy we have both had Mrs. Delamere's history in our minds, having so often discussed it together. Isn't it a pity we didn't confide in each other a little sooner?”

If any one had been watching Lawrence O'Donnell's face at the moment, they would have seen that he had grown quite pale.

“*You—you* have been writing on the same subject as this?”

“Yes. Was it not presumptuous of me? But I did it half to amuse myself in the evenings, when I had no other work to do. And the perusal of yours has shown me how very inferior mine is. So it has prevented my making a goose of myself, for which I thank you, Mr. O'Donnell.”

“I never imagined you had any taste for writing,” he murmured.

“I don't think I have, my dear boy, and especially since I have read yours.”

“But you mustn't lose heart, or destroy your

manuscript. Probably it will turn out by far the better book of the two."

"My dear Larry, as if I should *dream* of submitting it for public criticism by the side of yours. That would be presumption. I can't turn epigrammatic sentences, or quote from the classics, or describe a golfing link or a night club. Ah, you male animals have the advantage over us poor ignorant women in so many ways!"

She turned into her bedroom for a minute to smooth her hair, or take a vain feminine peep into the looking-glass, and when she turned back again, she found Larry had gone into the kitchen, and was busily engaged over the gas-stove.

"What an awful smoke! What are you doing there, Larry, meddling with my stove?" she exclaimed. But the next moment she guessed the truth; the ill-advised young man was burning a heap of paper over the gas. It was his manuscript, the work of months, that he was turning into a holocaust. As soon as Joan had divined the truth, she flew at him like a tiger. "What are you about, you little fool?" she cried. "You must be mad! What is the meaning of this folly? Whatever put such an idea into your head?" She tore the burning papers from his hand, but it was too late. The idealized history of Mr. and Mrs. Delamere's domestic troubles was lost to the

world for evermore; only a remnant of the writing remained, and that was too charred to be deciphered.

"What insane freak is this?" demanded Joan as the papers fell to pieces in her hands.

"I wish to burn them," said Larry sturdily. "Do you suppose I would publish a book that would take the wind out of your sails?"

"You silly oaf!" cried the girl; "didn't I tell you that mine was not a patch upon yours, that it was rubbish by comparison; and now you have destroyed all that beautiful writing of which I felt so proud—those delicious epigrams, those crisp, clever sentences. Oh, you are a double-distilled donkey! I could kill you for it!"

"I don't care how much you abuse me!" returned Larry, doggedly; "nothing would have induced me to come into the market against you."

"But I told you my story couldn't compare with yours; no one would take it—it is utter rubbish!"

"I don't believe it. And, anyway, we will write it over again together now; and, if you fancy my epigrams, we'll stick them in. Two heads are always better than one, they say; so we'll make a beautiful book of it between us, which shall take the world by storm, and——"

"And you have done this for *me*. Oh, Larry, how I wish—I wish——"

"What do you wish, dear?" replied her friend; but though the tears were standing in Joan's eyes at the thought of the magnitude of the sacrifice he had made for her sake, she had no opportunity of replying to his question, for at that moment there was a knock at the outer door, and her aunt, Miss Steele, and her cousin, Amelia James, entered the room.

They often visited Joan, but they had never appeared in the evening before, nor had they encountered a gentleman alone with her in the little flat, and they looked proportionately astonished. Joan was flushed and tearful, and Larry red and confused; on the whole Miss Steele considered it an occasion for sniffing in the most palpable manner.

"Joan my dear," she ejaculated, "your cousin and I drove over to see you this evening, making sure that we should find you alone at so late an hour."

"Is it late?" said Joan, recovering herself, and consulting her five-and-sixpenny 'Bee' clock; "half-past eight! I wonder *you* like to be gadding about so late, Aunt Eliza; it is seldom that you honor me at this time."

"That is true, my dear; but I come on particular business, and, as you see, I have brought Amelia with me. Will you introduce your friend?"

"Mr. Lawrence O'Donnell," said Joan, who was especially vexed that her relatives should

have encountered Larry there. "Mr. O'Donnell is one of our best-known press writers, and I am engaged in typing one of his manuscripts for him." But here the remembrance of *where* the manuscript was, made her feel rather "choky," and she relapsed into silence.

"Very pleased to make Mr. O'Donnell's acquaintance, though I cannot remember at this moment which of his writings I may have read," said Miss Steele.

"I dare say not!" replied Larry, with his sweet open smile. "*My* compositions are generally published anonymously. The press journalist does his good by stealth and blushes to find it fame, as you may see I am blushing now. Your niece does me too much honor, Miss Steele, in calling me well known. I am only a penny-a-liner for *Scraps* and *The Pink'un*."

"Don't run yourself down in that way," interposed Joan, reprovingly. "My aunt knows nothing of such distinctions. Mr. O'Donnell writes the cleverest essays in town, aunt."

"Oh, essays," remarked the old lady; "I know they are always moral. And do you ever write sermons, sir?" she continued to Larry.

"Often, madam," was the reply. "My motto is, 'Sermons in stones, and good in everything,' and when my sermons hit, my

opponents generally find there is a good deal of hard sense in them."

"Of course," replied Miss Steele, who was not quite sure if the young man were in jest or earnest. "But to return to the object of my visit, Joan. I am in great perplexity. Ellis is about to leave me!"

"Your paragon Ellis, aunt! I *am* surprised. I thought she possessed every virtue under the sun."

"So did I; but I have been sadly deceived. Amelia my dear, talk to that gentleman for a little while, and turn your head on one side. I wish to confide in your cousin Joan."

Miss Amelia James, who was a commonplace girl, with a fat face and meaningless expression, and had fixed her watery blue eyes on the handsome little journalist as soon as she had entered the room, appeared nothing loth to obey her aunt's command, and was soon laughing and talking with Larry on an ottoman in the embrasure of the window, whilst Joan, not quite pleased at the sudden intimacy, had to turn to Miss Steele and profess to be interested by what she had to tell her concerning the offending Ellis.

"Well, my dear—I must speak low on account of dear Amelia, for we keep such things from her as much as possible—as you say, Ellis appeared to be all we could desire until lately. You know how particular I am about

my spaniel Flo, and that it devolves upon my lady's-maid to wash the dear creature twice a week and take her out for an airing in the Park on every fine evening. I have given strict orders that on such occasions Flo is on no account to be loosed from her lead, for the Park is filled with all sorts of common and dirty dogs, with whom I wouldn't have Flo associate for all the world. Well, would you believe, yesterday, being an exceptionally fine evening, the general persuaded Amelia and me to take a little turn in the Park after dinner, and who should we come across but that disgraceful creature Ellis, walking arm-in-arm with some common man, and Flo—actually my dear Flo—without lead or collar on, racing through the dust with an awful looking animal, something between a bulldog and a Newfoundland, who was rolling her over and over as if she had been a veritable cur !”

“How very sad ! But then, aunt, you must remember that dogs know nothing about genealogy, and I dare say Flo enjoyed being rolled over !”

“My dear Joan, we never see matters in the same light ! It is not a question of what Flo liked, or did not like—only fancy the condition of her beautiful silky coat when she came indoors again ; and that disreputable Ellis, too, smelt so strongly of tobacco when she appeared to apologize for her behavior, that all I could

do was to send her out of the room to be purified before she approached me again. I gave her warning on the spot, of course, and am now all anxiety about her successor, for I will not go again to those deceiving registry offices if I can help it. I must have a recommendation from some respectable person."

"But how can I help you, aunt? I am not in the way of seeing servants out of place—keeping none myself!"

"Ah, my dear, that is your own fault! The general often speaks of your obstinacy in working for yourself! It is a great disgrace to the family, and we all feel it terribly. But, since you *do* so, I thought that Lord Mauleverer's housekeeper might assist us to find a really respectable and trustworthy lady's-maid. Wages, as you know, are no object; but I must have a young woman who has no predilection for the other sex—who dislikes men, in fact—or we shall never get on together!"

"She must dislike men and like dogs," replied Joan, in a *distracte* manner, with one eye fixed on the couple in the window, who were laughing together.

"Certainly! I cannot have Flo's hair entangled, or pulled, or the soap put into her eyes whilst being washed. The dear, faithful creature has suffered untold agonies at Ellis's hands in these particulars. And she must

not only avoid, but have an abhorrence for men. The general says," continued Miss Steele, lowering her voice, "that he actually saw what looked to him like a kiss pass between Ellis and the man she was walking with, before we came up with them! Fancy, how depraved, how immoral! How could I let the woman touch my clothes or my person after that?"

"And yet I suppose it is only natural!" said Joan, musingly.

"Natural, my dear Joan! It is natural to walk about without any clothes on; but you would not advocate it, I suppose, on that account! Natural! So is every crime that is ever committed. You have imbibed some terrible doctrines from living alone. I trust that gentleman is not a promulgator of them!"

"Mr. O'Donnell! Oh dear no!" replied Joan, wishing with all her heart that her aunt would take her departure and leave her to finish the conversation which her advent had interrupted; "but kissing does seem natural to a young woman, after all!"

"Joan, I am astonished at you! I really must go home if you give vent to such dreadful ideas." (I wish to goodness you would! thought her niece.) "*I* have now arrived at the age of sixty-five and have never been kissed by one of the opposite sex in my life!

I am a standing example that, if unnatural, it is perfectly possible to live without corruption of any sort, and I should indeed be sorry if I thought that you——”

“Oh, aunt, pray don't apply my simple suppositions to myself!” cried Joan. “I know no more about it than you do, and am likely to reach your age in the same state of innocence. But hasn't the evening suddenly turned rather cold?”

Miss Steele, who was subject to bronchitis, took alarm at once.

“I think you are right, my dear ; but your little room is so stuffy that it is difficult to say. But we can close the carriage windows as we return home. Now, don't forget to consult Lord Mauleverer's housekeeper respecting a lady's-maid for me! Amelia, I am ready to return!”

“Pray let me see you down to your carriage,” said Larry O'Donnell, as the ladies rose to go.

“Thank you!” replied Miss Steele, graciously, for though the general's ideas regarding his own sex were not complimentary, they did not always extend to his sister and granddaughter. “It is very good of you!”

So Larry politely offered his arm to Aunt Eliza, and the trio went talking together down the long flight of stone steps that led to the street.

Joan breathed a sigh of thankfulness as they left the room ; now, Larry would return to her side, and she would be able to tell him what she thought of the noble sacrifice he had made on her account—to thank him for his affection, and to plan how and when they were to meet in order to re-write the manuscript which she had half completed. Her cheeks glowed as she pictured the delightful evenings they would spend together, poring over the same page ; of the amount of education she would receive whilst correcting her faults under his guidance, and the *kudos* she would gain when the book appeared, shorn of its many errors and glorified by Larry's wit and perspicuity. She wondered if it would be published under their joint names, and if so, what the world would say about it and what inference it would draw, the discovery her grandfather would fancy he had made, and the wicked pleasure she should feel in undeceiving him ! But why didn't Larry come back ? Was Miss Steele's carriage not to be found, or had they asked him to walk home with them ? Joan commenced to chafe under the delay ; it was like Aunt Eliza and that underhand Mealy to try and usurp the friend of another woman, just because they dared not have any gentlemen acquaintances of their own ! But their conversation and manners would not suit Larry ; she felt sure of that ; he had so

often told her that she was the only woman with whom he could converse with any pleasure. Still—why did he not come? It was twenty minutes since they had left the room. Joan went out into the passage and hung over the banisters to see if she could hear any sound of voices in the hall below—but all was perfectly quiet, and after a while she was fain to believe that, finding they had detained him so long, Larry had considered it too late to return to her rooms and had gone to his club instead. How provoking! But she was still so agitated and disturbed by what had taken place between them, that Joan felt she could not sleep until she had spoken a few words to him on paper. So she wrote him a short note, telling him of her disappointment at the unseasonable interruption they had encountered, and begging him, if disengaged, to come and see her on the following evening and talk over the matter they were discussing when her relations arrived.

After which she spent the remainder of the evening in trying to recall the various epigrams and bits of smart writing, which had attracted her most in O'Donnell's manuscript. in order that they might reproduce them in the new edition of Mrs. Delamere's troubles. The sacrifice which her friend had made on her behalf had so thoroughly convinced her of his disinterested feelings for her, that Joan went to bed in good spirits and waked so on

the following morning. She was arrayed in her walking suit, ready to start for Lord Maulverer's house, when a loud and authoritative rapping on her outer door with a stout cane, preceded the entrance of General Steele, in a state of pent-up excitement. He was a thin, acidulated-looking old man, not unlike his sister, with an eagle eye, a hooked nose, and a beardless chin, which had been the *bete noir* of his life. Being moreover endowed with a squeaky voice, and a general want of muscle, he was compelled in order to cover the deficiencies in his sex, to talk as if through a speaking trumpet, and generally to bully on the slightest occasion. Joan wanted a share of her grandfather's money, but she had never been afraid of her grandfather, nor pandered to any of his unjust demands. Seeing, on the present occasion, that General Steele looked very blood-shot about the eyes and purple about the mouth and throat, which betokened an inward raging which only waited to explode, she smiled on him with her very best smile.

"Well, grandfather!" she said. "And what brings you out so early this morning? Nothing wrong, I hope!" and she offered the old man a chair.

"Nothing wrong?" he repeated angrily. "*Everything* is wrong, miss! Your aunt brought home a pleasant tale of you and your doings last night—that she looked in upon you

at nine o'clock in the evening, and found you here alone with a man—a man, I say. Do you dare to deny it?"

"That Mr. O'Donnell is a man, grandfather, I really couldn't say for certain, but I have always been given to understand as much!"

"Don't you try any of your badinage upon me," said the general; "you know well enough what I mean! You have done that which your cousin Amelia would scorn to do—would be too much afraid of my displeasure to dare to do—sitting alone with a man at nine o'clock at night—disgraceful! Infamous! I won't allow it!"

"Amelia never has the opportunity to disobey you," retorted Joan, spiritedly; "she would talk with men fast enough if she ever met any. As it is, she did the next best thing! She and Aunt Eliza combined, walked off with my gentleman friend last evening, and forgot to return him!"

"What do you mean, you brazen hussy?"

"Just what I say, grandfather! They induced Mr. O'Donnell to leave the flat with them, and what they have done with him I do not know—most likely eaten him between them, for he never returned to tell the tale!"

"You will not get out of it this way, Joan. Your aunt is discretion itself."

"And well she may be at five and sixty," interpolated his granddaughter.

"Age has nothing whatever to do with it!"

"Oh, hasn't it? The men don't say so!"

"There again! The men. That I should have lived to hear a granddaughter of mine talk in so familiar a way of the male sex! It all comes of your mother——"

"Now, grandfather," said Joan, standing very erect, "you may say what you like to me about all this nonsense, for I shall always follow my common sense in such matters, but I will not allow you to bring my mother's name into the matter. If she did anything to displease you, I feel sure it was because you tried to bully her, as you do Amelia and me—and no girl of spirit would submit to it, or ever will. Do you allow us to have no brains or feelings, that you try to wind us up like clock-work, and make us go or stop according to your will? Perhaps you think like the Eastern nations, that we have no souls?"

"Hoity toity, miss! Here's a storm in a tea-cup! You will come to ruin, Joan! You are a great deal too independent! Your being here is a proof of it! I said it would lead to your destruction."

"In what way? I am earning a fair income, living a quiet life, and am exempt from the delightful domestic rows which flavor the atmosphere of Queen's Gate. If you don't consider that an improvement, grandfather, I do!"

"You are most impertinent!" replied the old man; "pray, to what 'rows' do you allude?"

"The hourly, momentarily ones! You can't carry on a conversation for ten minutes without having a row! I pity poor Aunt Eliza and Amelia; but if they are so tame as to submit to it, they have probably become hardened, which I could never do. Give me my four-roomed flat, and let me wait upon myself sooner than have my digestion ruined. Better is a dinner of herbs eaten all alone than a stalled ox with General Steele at the head of the table!"

"Is it eaten alone? That's the question!" sneered the general. "How often does Mr. O'Donnell or Mr. Somebody-else share the herbs with you?"

"Not often, unfortunately; my salary won't run to dinner-parties. But, if they did, whose business is it but mine?"

"Joan, remember what I have told you—that if you marry without my consent—and you'll never get it—you will lose your share of my fortune. My income amounts to fourteen thousand a year, and you and Amelia are the only ones I have to bequeath it to. But she shall have it all if you fly in my face and marry one of these penny-a-liners, by whom you seem to be surrounded."

"I can't help that!" cried Joan, defiantly;

"your money is your own—you must do with it as you think best. If I had set my heart on marrying a costermonger, I'd do it ; so I give you fair warning, grandfather !"

"You had better let me catch you at it !" exclaimed the general, fuming because with all his threats he could not frighten the girl.

"Catch me if you can !" replied Joan. "I fancy you would have to get up very early in the morning to circumvent a woman. But, jesting apart, what is all this nonsense about ? You have got up too early and upset your liver. Better go home and take a little Carter, and come and talk to me when you feel better."

"You'll repent this when it's too late !" said her grandfather.

"What am I to repent of ?"

"Your independent and daring spirit. Now, what's this man O'Donnell to you ?"

"Nothing."

"Why does your aunt find him here, then, sitting in your pocket ?"

"He wasn't in my pocket—that is the effect of Aunt Eliza's prurient imagination. She wanted him in hers—he was sitting on a chair."

"Your aunt told me she found you in tears."

"Nasty old sneak ! Well, and if I were—what then ?"

"If this fellow hadn't been making love to you, why should you have cried?"

"Because I wanted to sit on his lap, and he wouldn't let me!"

"*What?*" roared the general.

"He belongs to the Salvation Army, and is horridly particular. But that is better than entertaining a man who urged me to do so, isn't it?"

"I never heard of so disgraceful a thing in all my life!" bellowed General Steele, "to *ask* a low fellow to let you sit on his knee, and to be refused. You're a blot on the family name."

"But I don't bear the family name, luckily for you, grandfather. I'm only a Trevor, remember. But, seriously, do you think that Aunt Eliza never sat upon a fellow's knee?"

"My sister! Most certainly not! She would sooner die! And as for Amelia——"

"Oh, never mind Mealy—you don't know what she does when your back is turned! But yourself, grandfather, have you never sat upon a lady's knee?"

"What do you take me for, you impudent jade?"

"Or taken a girl upon yours?" added Joan, slyly.

"Most decidedly not—well, I mean, of course—anyway, such things happened so long ago that I've forgotten all about them.

But to renew our discussion—remember, if you marry, you'll get no money from me or in my will."

"Very well, grandfather, I understand. But you need not fear that I shall ever trouble you with wedding-cards, or come back upon you for wedding-cake or favors!"

"I hope not indeed! If you do, you know what to expect!"

"And is Mealy to live in virgin blessedness as well as myself?"

"During my lifetime, most certainly! If you elect to marry millionaires, you'll be independent of me; but assistance of any kind you will never receive for a poor marriage. I have seen what it means too often—there is no safeguard for young women nowadays, except by keeping free from it all."

"I wonder you ever married yourself, grandfather. But then, of course, you would never have had two such charming granddaughters as Mealy and me!"

"*Charming*, indeed!" muttered the old man; "you've been a curse and a trouble ever since you were brought home for me to support."

"Yes—I've heard you say that more than once before, and that is why I determined not to be a curse to you any longer. You made the bread too bitter for me, grandfather."

"Well, don't make it more bitter by risking

the loss of your inheritance," said the old man, rising to go.

"I don't mean to do so. Perhaps I like men as little as you do. Certainly *you* have never done anything to put the sex in an agreeable light before me."

"Ah, you always had a saucy tongue, ever since you learned how to use it, Joan!"

"And you a rough one, ever since I can remember!" she retorted.

But as the general, in turning to leave the room, slightly stumbled against a rug, her arm was ready to steady him again, and her fresh young face looked affectionately into his.

"Take care, old man," she said; "I don't want to come into that legacy one day sooner than necessary."

He turned and just kissed the saucy chin that came on a level with his shoulder.

"And you take care, too, my dear," he replied in a more kindly tone; "no penny-aliners, or no legacy."

And then he went slowly down-stairs, wishing somehow that his granddaughter Joan and he did not come into angry contact so frequently, or that he had been able to make her happier and more contented in Queen's Gate.

"But she's a fine girl," he said to himself, as he wended his way homewards, "and if her heart were involved, I doubt if the prospect of millions would keep her from having

her own way! Well, well—I wonder if it would make much difference, after all. It's only a whim of mine—only a whim."

And the girl, whilst drawing on her gloves, was thinking with a heightened color—

"How degrading it is to be hampered by unreasonable objections and taken to task like a child for every trifling indiscretion—if it be one. But I mustn't lose that seven thou.—*I can't*. After all, it only means waiting for a few years, and then salvation for life for me and—and—anybody else!"

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Larry O'Donnell received that little note from Joan Trevor, he was in the seventh heaven. It was the first time that she had absolutely invited him to visit her, and he augured great things from it. She must *like* him, to say the least of it, he told himself, since she took the trouble to write and ask him to return, and where a girl *liked* and a man *loved*, untold possibilities might follow. Larry stuck his hands in his pockets and walked two inches higher for the rest of the day. But by the time he reached the flat in Chelsea that afternoon, somewhat of a change had come over the spirit of Joan's dream. Her grandfather's visit had ruffled her, and made her remember the tyranny of which man is capable ; and she had had time also to reflect on the curt manner in which Larry had left her the evening before, and to argue with herself whether he were worth recalling, after all. So she received him in a dignified and rather cool manner, and toppled the poor little man from the heights of Olympus down to the depths of another place.

"Aren't you well?" he inquired in a feebly disappointed manner.

"Well!" said Joan, sharply. "Of course I'm well. Have you ever known me ill? Why should you ask! I didn't go gallivanting with a couple of strangers at nine o'clock at night, all up Sloane Street, I presume, and through the Park!"

"What *are* you talking of?"

"Your politeness last evening in leaving me without a word of farewell, to escort my beautiful cousin Mealy and my interesting great-aunt back to Queen's Gate."

"You don't mean to say that you're offended? I thought you would like me to show some attention to your relatives."

"And why? They're not likely ever to belong to you! I don't deny my cousin's superior attractions; but——"

"Oh, Joan, don't be a goose! You've made me quite unhappy enough already. The fact is, the carriage was not in sight when we reached the street; and Miss Steele asked me to walk a little way with them to find it, and when they drove off, Hickman stopped me to put a question, and carried me off to the club, and so——"

"You forgot all about your humble servant—*bien oblige*," interposed Joan, with a courtsey.

"Joan! you know that I never forget you ;

but the evening was getting on, and I thought you would be going to bed, so I judged it better not to return. And this morning I got your note, and it made me so happy ; but now——”

“ Well, what now ? ”

“ You seem cross with me, as if I had done something wrong.”

“ Well, I believe, on consideration, that I *am* a bit nasty ; but it's not with you, Larry. It's with the world and everything in it. Grandfather stumped in this morning as I was starting for Clanricarde Gardens, and gave me a horrible jobation, all on account of you.”

“ Who has told him about me ? ”

“ Why my dear aunt Eliza, of course ; spiteful old cat ! She's never had an admirer of her own, and so she hates any one else to have one.”

“ So she discovered I am an admirer ! That was rather 'cute of the old girl, wasn't it ? ”

“ Why any one could see it, you stupid boy, when you goggle your eyes like that. Anyway, she went back and told grandfather that she had found me sitting alone with you, and that I was crying (which was a story), and the old man was in an awful rage. Oh, I *did* lead him a dance ? ”

“ What did you say ? Something wicked, I bet.”

"I told him I was crying because you refused to let me sit on your knee; because you belonged to the Salvation Army and were very particular; and he fumed like a salted snail."

"I am afraid you must have scandalized his ideas of maidenly propriety, besides taking away my character. Fancy being accused of refusing to let a pretty girl sit on my knee! Thank goodness, I have never been guilty of *that!*"

"Oh, I dare say you have had plenty of girls on your knee," cried Joan, tossing her head; "but *I* shall never make one of the number."

"Don't be too sure. You are perilously near me at the present moment. One pull and you would be down."

"If you presumed to take such a liberty——" commenced the girl; and then catching the expression in his eyes, she said, suddenly, "Oh, Larry, don't be so silly. Talk sense. General Steele has his knife into you, I can tell you!"

"I don't care for that, so long as you keep yours in its sheath. What had the old gentleman to say about me?"

"He called you a penny-a-liner, and asked what you were to me, and why Aunt Eliza had found you sitting in my pocket. And then he repeated his usual execration, and

said that if I married without his consent, he should leave all his money (fourteen thousand a year—only fancy, Larry !) to my cousin Amelia, and I replied that he could do as he bally-well liked, but that I should——”

“Marry me ?” interpolated Larry.

“Not a bit of it ; follow his example, and he would have to get up very early in the morning to circumvent me. So we parted on equal terms, neither of us having pledged ourselves to any decided action with regard to the other. But let us drop grandfather for the present ; I’m sure we’ve had quite enough of him. I haven’t yet thanked you for what you did yesterday. I know I abused you and called you names ; I’m a devil when I’m excited. But oh, Larry, I think it was a glorious action on your part !”

“What are you talking about, you silly girl ?”

“You know—your burning your lovely manuscript ; I was very cross with you at first for being so stupid ; but when I came to think over it, I felt—oh, I cannot tell you what I felt !—that it was the kindest and noblest thing I had ever heard of ! But you shouldn’t—you shouldn’t, indeed—not for me !”

“And who else do you think I would have done it for, Joan ?” he said tenderly.

“I don’t know,” she answered shyly ;
“Amelia, perhaps !”

"Oh, dash Amelia! Joan, does it convince you that I love you better than myself?"

"Ye-es. I suppose it does!"

"And can't you love me a little in return? Are we to wait all those years, dear, until your grandfather is gone; wasting our beautiful youth which will never return to us, for the sake of a few pounds?"

"Oh, not a few!" remonstrated Joan, with open eyes. "Seven thousand a year, remember!"

"Well, even seven thousand a year; will that repay us for living so long without love and each other? General Steele may live for another twenty years."

"He does look disgustingly healthy," conceded Joan. "His cheeks are as red as a winter apple!"

"And I love you so dearly," pleaded Larry, with all his soul in his eyes; "I would even consent to the rational marriage you spoke of the other day, sooner than feel we were nothing to each other."

"Would you really?" cried Joan, eagerly. "If I consented to marry you, would you promise to keep it a dead secret till I have got my seven thousand a year?"

"If you wished it and I could get you on no other terms—certainly I would," replied Larry.

"How delicious it would be to cheat the

old man, and I gave him fair warning of it, too! Fancy his disgust when he opened his eyes in Hades to find his will had been administered and I a married woman all the time. My only drawback would be that I couldn't witness his futile rage!"

"Joan, Joan, will you never be serious? Answer my question! Don't keep me in suspense! Will you marry me?"

"In a strictly rational manner—with laws drawn up according to those of the Medes and Persians that altered not—YES!"

"Oh, you darling girl, how happy you have made me!" exclaimed O'Donnell, trying to take her in his arms.

"Stop! stop! That's not rational, to begin with! Now, remember, if I consent to this ridiculous plan, it is only with a view to two things—firstly, to cheat my stingy old grandfather; and secondly, to make you some amends for having burnt your lovely story for my sake!",

"I don't care what you do it for, so long as it is done!" replied the happy Larry. "Only, Joan, you *do* love me a little—don't you, darling?"

"Now, now, no 'darlings'; that will be one of the strictest rules of the rational marriage—darling invariably ends in 'brute' and 'Jezebel,' and other pretty names of like kind! To be rational is to be sober in our

words as well as our deeds. First of all, you understand that matters are to remain on precisely the same footing as now."

"*Precisely?*" repeated Larry, with a deprecating look.

"Well, with variations, of course ; but everything must be conducted on a strictly secret plan, I am to remain here, and you—wherever you may choose. We shall meet, of course ; often I hope, but it must be by appointment ; and no one in your circle or mine is to know that we are anything more than friends to one another !"

"And where shall we go for the honeymoon?" inquired Larry, joyfully ; but Joan's look of severe reproach took him down a peg immediately.

"*Honeymoon?*" she reiterated. "A honeymoon for a rational marriage ! What are you thinking of ? Why, that would disclose the whole thing at once !"

"No honeymoon?" said Larry, mournfully.

"Certainly not ! When I get my holiday, if you can manage to go to the same place, we will choose some secluded spot and see as much of each other as possible ; but pray don't mention so vulgar an idea as a honeymoon again. The honey goes bad too soon. You will want me to dress in white satin and orange blossoms next ! Well, if this thing is to be (though, upon my word, I think we had better

keep as we are)—but, if you are decided, we must draw up the agreement between us !”

“I thought the registrar would do that !” said Larry.

“As far as the legality goes, yes ; but I won’t marry you unless we have a written agreement between ourselves, as to what we are, and are not, to do. You cannot be hanging about my flat all day, for example—it would create suspicion.”

“What *may* I do ?” demanded the young man, ruefully.

“Hold your tongue, and ask no more questions, until we have drawn up the conditions.”

She went to her writing-table as she spoke, and brought back a large sheet of paper with a pen and ink, which she set down before him.

“Will you write it, or shall I ?” she said, “I think my hand is the clearer of the two !”

“Oh dear, yes ! Your hand and head and everything. I confess the rationality of this proceeding has completely muddled me.”

“Now, Larry, if you’re going to be nasty, I won’t marry you at all ! How shall we begin ? ‘An agreement made this fifteenth day of June, 189— : between Joan Trevor of the first part and Lawrence O’Donnell—’”

“Shouldn’t it be ‘Lawrence O’Donnell and Joan Trevor,’ ” suggested Larry, humbly.

“Not a bit of it ! It’s *my* suggestion, so I

come first. We should have no agreement if it were not for me——”

“You’re right there; by Jove!” muttered her companion.

“We the undersigned,” continued Joan, writing, “having agreed to enter into a rational marriage with one another, bind ourselves down to observe the following conditions, namely——”

“It’s not legal, you know,” observed Larry, “it’s not worth the paper it’s written on.”

“I know that,” said Joan; “but the question is, am I going to marry a gentleman?”

“I hope so.”

“In that case, his honor will compel him to keep these conditions, whether they are according to law or not.”

“All right, my dear, go on.”

Joan then proceeded to fill up the paper with a string of conditions, chief amongst which were—that the married couple bound themselves never to meet without a previous appointment; not to object to each other’s friends, or pursuits; not to make any demands upon one another for money; and above all, never to divulge either by word, look, or sign, that they were man and wife.

“I think that’s all,” said Joan, with a look of satisfaction as she presented the paper to O’Donnell to sign; “I cannot think of anything more.”

"I am glad you can't," grumbled Larry, as he scrawled his name at the bottom of the sheet ; "it strikes me that with this paper we stand very much in the same position as we did before. No wedding, no honeymoon, no congratulations, no Mrs. O'Donnell, and, I conclude, no wedding-ring."

"Oh, I can wear that on my watch chain, it will do just as well !" replied Joan. "And as for being called by your name, of course that is out of the question ; but I shall be your wife all the same, so that doesn't signify. But, now, there's another thing I want to speak to you about. We cannot be too careful in a serious matter like this, you know. I think we ought to tell each other of any little blemishes we may possess, or bad habits we have contracted, because we might be so disappointed afterwards. I have known married women complain bitterly of things which had they known beforehand, they said would have prevented their marrying at all."

"What sorts of things?" asked Larry.

"Well, Mrs. Dimsdale told me once that her husband disgusted her so by sucking his teeth after meals, and by snoring at night, and the longer they lived together, the worse he grew. That was very disgusting you know, wasn't it?"

"I don't suck my teeth," said Larry.

"No ; but you may do other things perhaps,

or you may have personal blemishes that I might not like. Had we not better confide everything to each other now, to prevent all disappointments when it is too late?"

"All right! Shall we begin with blemishes? I have a bunion on my big toe!"

"Have you really? Is it painful, Larry? What do you do for it?"

"We are not considering remedies. Let us confine ourselves to deformities. First, there is the bunion; then I have had two teeth knocked out."

"Two teeth! What a shame!" cried Joan. "I have never seen that. You might just as well have kept it to yourself, Larry."

"No! no! you bound me to be truthful. Then I'm not quite sure if one of my feet is not a little larger than the other. If my boots are exactly the same size, one of them is sure to pinch."

"But you have such little feet for a man, I don't think that signifies in the least."

"I believe that's all, except that my hair is getting a bit gray on the top."

"Where, where?" cried Joan, leaving her seat to examine his poll.

"Oh, you won't see it by this light! Then I'm afraid I snore sometimes when I get upon my back."

"Oh, that doesn't signify!" said Joan, demurely.

"By Jove, no ! I forgot ours was to be a rational marriage. Now, Joan, it's your turn. Out with it all ! I hate to be disappointed."

"But, Larry, I've been thinking it over, and I'm afraid I haven't much to tell you. I have a large mole on my left shoulder, but some people like that, and when I was a child, I broke my little finger—it's rather crooked, you see—but I never rouge, or darken my eyebrows, I have no need of it, but I do powder sometimes when it's a hot day, or I feel like it. And honestly, I think that's all."

"I'll risk it !" said Larry, philosophically. "I've bought a horse at auction more than once before this, and have never made a serious mistake yet !"

"But, stop, that's not all ! How about our antecedents ?"

"Antecedents !" echoed Larry, pulling his mustaches.

"Yes ; our old loves, you know, and such things. They might crop up unexpectedly, and prove inconvenient. How many times have you been in love, Larry ?"

"*Never*, till now," he replied mendaciously.

"Oh, I don't believe that, when you've been half over the world ! You *must* have been in love. Remember, ours is to be a rational marriage ; and there must be no deception on either side !"

Thus pressed, Mr. O'Donnell murmured—

"Well, I may have had one or two flirtations ; but nothing serious—not like what I feel for you, Joan. There was a girl in Madrid that I was very spooney on for a few weeks, but she was a great simpleton ; I should have been sick of her in a month if we had seen more of each other—and I went rather mad once over an Italian girl. Oh ! by Jove, she *was* pretty ; but her brothers came sneaking after me with stilettos, so I decamped and saw my beauty no more ! "

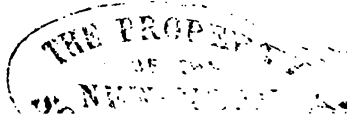
"What a mean thing to do !" cried Joan. "I suppose that's what I may expect from you if the old man discovers the trick we have played on him, and wanders up and down outside my flat with the carvers ! "

"Joan, don't compare the feelings I have ever had for other women with what I have for you ! I would dare any amount of danger for your sake—even your grandfather's carving-knife ! "

"That's the sort of thing you all say beforehand, but you generally sing very small when the danger is in view."

"Ah, Joan, you women never can, and never will, understand the difference between a man's admiration and his love. The one he can feel for fifty women—the other for only *one* ! "

"Oh, go along ; I don't believe a word of it !" cried Joan. "I've heard it too often before ! "



"You've heard it before? Do you mean to say, then, that you've been in love before you met me?"

Joan looked down upon him with proud contempt.

"Before I met you! Whoever said I *was* in love with you? Not I, for a certainty. Were I in love with you I should certainly not consent to marry you." -

"Oh, you incomprehensible girl, what do you mean?"

"That if you're in love with a man, you are blind and deaf, and have not the slightest notion what he is like, or if he will suit you! In which case it is better to wait until you are out of love again, before you marry him. Now, I am entering on this contract with you with all my senses in perfect order. I like you awfully, Larry; but I can see all your defects, my dear boy, as I have seen them for years past, and I hope you can do the same by me!"

"I am sure I can't—you have none!" replied Larrikins.

Joan looked really annoyed.

"Now a speech like that, so senseless and untrue, makes me more afraid of marrying you than anything else. No defects, when you know I have a fearful temper, over which I have no control. I called you a fool the other day, and I shall call it you heaps of

times more, so don't expect anything else, please ! Then, I'm as obstinate as the old gentleman, by which I mean General Steele, though the same cognomen might apply to them both, and I hate being contradicted, and——"

"Oh, spare me the remainder of the catalogue !" said Larry. "I know you are as full of faults as an egg is full of meat ; but you haven't loved any one so as to want to marry him, eh ?"

"Indeed I have, only Fate mercifully interposed to prevent the sacrifice. There was Willie Henniker—I was awfully spooney on him last year, and I think he proposed to me about five times ; but—but——"

"Why didn't you take *him* ?" demanded Larry, eagerly. "He is very handsome and has a good income. What was the obstacle ?"

"I don't know," replied Joan, dubiously ; "he didn't seem to suit, somehow. And Captain Hildyard—you've met him here several times : he's in the Hussars, and I love soldiers ; he proposed to me only last month."

"And why didn't you marry him, in the name of goodness ?" asked Larry, irritably.

"Well, I thought he was stupid. He was all right to flirt with ; but when it came to closer quarters, I decided I should get very sick of him !"

"And I suppose you will get sick of me

also," said O'Donnell, in a discontented voice. "I'm not a patch upon either Henniker or Hildyard ; I know that well enough. I'm not good-looking, and I'm short, without any particular birth and a paucity of brains. We'd better break this business off, Joan. There's nothing in me to hold you, any more than in the men you have spoken of !"

The next thing he felt was the touch of the girl's hand upon his head, as he sat holding it between his hands.

"I think there is, Larry," she said softly, "I think what will bind me to you is—affection !"

"You love me !" he cried, lifting up a radiant face. "Really and truly, Joan ?"

"Should I be entering into this agreement with you if I did not ?"

"But you are so different from other girls ; you never show what you feel. I have been afraid sometimes, that you were only doing this for a joke—for a little excitement—what you yourself would call a spree !"

"It would prove a sorry spree for me if that were all," said Joan. "You have been my friend now, Larry, for years, and I wish to be your best and closest friend for the rest of your life and mine. Isn't that enough ? Won't it 'wash' as well, or better, than if all I thought of was to sit on your knee, as Cecily used to do on Captain Crosbie's, and

kiss you and call you 'darling'? I can *think* 'darling' quite as well as other girls—don't you make any mistake about that—but I want to enter on this new phase of life with a clear mind and head, and a practical view of its responsibilities, and though a rational marriage such as we propose to undertake may seem to indicate a want of affection on my part, depend on it, it would be much more selfish, both in you and me, to marry openly and risk losing what will make us comfortable for all our lives. But if you would rather wait——" she concluded wistfully.

"Rather wait!" exclaimed the young man, "of course I would, until your bonny hair is gray! Joan, I am the very happiest man in London to-night! Tell me, when may I go and arrange matters with the registrar?"

"Need we think about that yet?"

"Certainly! I shall not sleep until the matter is settled now, and, knowing how hard my press duties are, I am sure you would not rob me of my natural rest. This is Tuesday—shall we say Thursday?"

"But I cannot go for my holiday until July," said Joan.

"Never mind the holiday. All life will be one long holiday when I know my girl is my own. Shall I call for you on Thursday? We can get it over before you are due in Clanricarde Gardens."

"Very well," said Joan, with a little hesitation; "if you really wish it, let it be Thursday."

"And won't you come away with me from Saturday to Monday, darling?"

Joan put her hand over his mouth, as she replied—

"If you will conduct the trip on rational lines, Larry."

"What does that mean, my dear?"

"No wedding-ring—no Mrs. O'Donnell—only two friends going on a holiday together—not even the same hotel, Larry, indeed, it wouldn't do; some one would be certain to carry the tale to grandfather; these things always leak out somehow, you know, and if you won't promise——"

"What?"

"I won't go away at all," said Joan.

"I have consented, and I will abide by it," said Larry; "but it is awfully hard."

"Perhaps; but it is the only way. It is that or nothing, Larry."

"Then let it be *that*, by all means," cried the young man, as he rose to take his leave. "We haven't said much about the book to-night, Joan; but that will keep. We have a whole lifetime before us in which to write it together."

"Yes; we will have some delightful evenings here, dedicated to the cultivation of our in-

telleets," said the girl. "I shall have to devise some means of hiding you, Larry, if we should be borne down upon again by my mischievous old aunt or infuriated grandfather. Let me see. Where could I put you in case of a surprise?"

"Oh, you can put me anywhere," said Larry. "That's the best of being a little fellow; one can fit under a lady's dressing-table, or stand in her wardrobe, or get under the bed. You'll find no difficulty about that."

"All right!" cried Joan, laughing, "I'll buy a little dog-basket, and trim it prettily with pink calico and muslin, and then, when a knock sounds on the outer door, all I shall have to do will be to pop you in and turn the basket to the wall."

"That's it," said Larry, in the same strain. "See the incalculable advantages of marrying a man five feet seven!"

"Yes; when the marriage is to be conducted on rational principles," replied the girl, as she stood with the door-handle in her hand.

"Does not the rational marriage admit of a kiss on saying good-night?" asked Larry, wistfully.

Her answer was to throw her arms about his neck and strain him to her bosom.

"Oh, Larry," she whispered, "I love you, I love you!" And then, as if half ashamed of her unusual emotion, she hastily closed the

door and refused to re-open it for all his knocking. But she was ready to accompany him to the registrar's when he called for her on Thursday morning. She looked very handsome, as, flushed and excited, she joined him, dressed in her ordinary walking things.

"I am half afraid," she whispered, as they gained the street.

"Why, dearest? Not of me, I hope."

"No; of myself—lest I should be doing you a wrong by this marriage, hampering your path in life, and burdening you with a secret sense of your responsibilities."

"They will be very happy responsibilities, dear Joan—they will make my daily duties lighter, and keep me from many a folly and weakness to which I am subject now. Wherever I go and whatever I do, there will be a voice whispering in my ear, 'For Joan's sake—for the sake of your dear, sweet wife, be strong, be forbearing, be courageous, and do your duty like a man.' I have not always done it, dear; and if I grow better now, it will be through your influence and my love for you."

Joan actually put up her hand and brushed the tears from her eyes—Joan, the independent, the determined, the unromantic, crying! It was an anomaly, but it was true. She slid her hand under Larry's arm and let it rest there. She did not feel at all nervous when

they reached the registrar's office ; it was in a town hall, and had nothing solemn or awe-inspiring in its appearance. The ceremony, also, was so brief and businesslike, that she was astonished when she was told that it was over. She did not feel as if she had been married at all ; she glanced at Lawrence O'Donnell, to whom she had just vowed eternal faith, and was surprised to find that he looked the same as before, excepting that he was broadly grinning, which somehow struck her unpleasantly. She twisted the wedding-ring upon her finger, and said under her breath, " Married, married ! " two or three times, as if trying to convince herself of the truth ; and then she sat down on a chair close by and burst into tears. The sight horrified Larry ; was this strange girl already regretting the decision she had come to ? He went up to her side, and tried to console her.

" You are not sorry, Joan dear, are you ? "

" No, no ! "—shaking her head.

" Then why do you cry ? You distress me horribly. It looks as if you regretted having become my wife."

" Am I really your wife, Larry ? It all seems so businesslike and unnatural. There has been no solemnity about it ! It didn't take five minutes ; that man gabbled so ! Are you *sure* it is legal—that it is not all a farce ? "

"Quite legal, dearest. I should like to see the man who would try to dispute it. We are as fast bound to each other as if the Archbishop of Canterbury had tied the knot in Westminster Abbey. You are my wife for ever, thank God! Come, it is no use our waiting here any longer. Let us have a turn in the Park before you go to Clanricarde Gardens."

"No; I would rather go straight there, please, Larry. I—I feel a little upset—I can hardly believe it is true! Leave me to myself for a little while, and let me think it over."

"All right, my darling—just as you wish! And I am due at the office at ten-thirty. But to-night, Joan—to-night I may come up and take tea with you, mayn't I?"

Joan would fain have answered in the negative; the ceremony had seemed so unreal, that she felt afraid of herself and of him—in fact, she did not realize in the least that she was actually the wife of Lawrence O'Donnell; but she could not bear to hurt his feelings, and so she stammered out "Yes." But as the hansom, into which her husband put her, proceeded to the house of Lord Mauleverer, she could not help asking herself, notwithstanding her prejudices, "Would her marriage have seemed more real, more complete, more sacred, if it had been solemnized in a church?"

CHAPTER IV.

LORD MAULEVERER happened to be in an ill-humor that day, and Joan was proportionately irritated with him. There had been a caustic review in the *Times* that morning of his speech in the House of Lords the night before, and his lordship saw that he had made rather a fool of himself, and nothing is more calculated to upset one's liver, especially when the mistake is irretrievable. So Joan had to suffer in consequence. Nothing the girl did was right. She took down her shorthand notes too slowly; her comprehension was dull; she was of no earthly use at all.

"If that is the case," said Joan, with assumed meekness, "perhaps your lordship will permit me to go home. I have several duties awaiting me there."

"Not a bit of it! I wonder at your proposing such a thing! What do I pay you for, I should like to know? Have you cut out the criticisms on my last night's speech on the tactics of the Commander-in-Chief and pasted them into the scrap-book?"

"Do you really wish to keep them?" asked innocent Joan, with wide-open eyes.

"Wish to keep them?—of course. Do you suppose I place any reliance on what these confounded penny-a-liners say?"

"Some of the penny-a-liners, as your lordship pleases to call them," replied Joan, with proud emphasis, "possess the grandest brain of the century! If you knew them personally you would acknowledge it. The acumen of their criticisms goes to prove what I say. ('That's one for you and your speech, old boy!'" she mentally added.)

"Very likely, Miss Trevor, very likely," replied Lord Mauleverer. "But I do not know them, nor wish to do so. I leave that for persons in their own position of life. Have you finished copying out the list of quotations I gave you?"

"They are all ready. But your lordship's translation of the phrase, 'So difficult was it to found the Roman nation,' is faulty. It should be, '*Tantæ molis erat Romanam condere gentem.*'"

"All right, all right," said Lord Mauleverer testily, for he disliked nothing so much (being a poor classical scholar) as to have his Latin corrected for him ("and by an impudent slip of a girl, too," as he said to himself). "Go on with your work, if you please, Miss Trevor, and leave the quotations till to-morrow. I have a headache and wish to be quiet!"

"Poor old dear!" thought his secretary

"For 'headache' read 'criticisms,' and we shall get nearer the truth. I wonder if Larry wrote that article in the *Morning Post*! I shouldn't be surprised to hear he did. He's awfully clever and bright, is Larry!"

And Joan fell to thinking of the journalist and press-writer, almost forgetting the close connection in which he now stood to herself. But the wedding-ring, which she had tied on a piece of ribbon and slung round her neck, pressed against her bosom every now and then as she bent over the typewriter, and sent the hot blood coursing from her heart to her face as she thought of the awful thing she had done, and that she no longer (notwithstanding the list of conditions) belonged to herself.

It was comforting, notwithstanding, when the dreary morning with Lord Mauleverer and his ill-temper was at an end, and she was free to wend her way to Chelsea, to remember that Larry was coming to tea and that he loved sweet things. Joan stopped at a baker's to buy a sally-lunn, and was toasting and buttering it vigorously when Larry entered her room, and came up behind her and kissed the nape of her neck as she bent over the stove.

"Order, order!" she cried merrily; but she turned her face round, nevertheless, to meet the kisses he showered on her.

"Oh, Larry, my friend, I've had such a day of it!" she exclaimed.

"And so have I, my sweetheart ! I have been making a fool of myself all around with my thoughts full of you, and felt as if I couldn't tell B from a bull's foot, so I cut it short and came on here. What upset you, my darling ? Thoughts of your Larry ?"

"Not a bit of it ! Old Lord Mauleverer and his ill-temper. He was nearly mad over the *Times* and *Post* reviews. Larry, you scamp, did you write them ?"

"Don't know, I'm sure ! I am not accountable for anything that may have happened yesterday or to-day. Joan, where shall we go on Saturday ?"

"Is it possible for us to go anywhere ? You can, of course, if you feel inclined ; but I've just remembered that Sunday is, as a rule, the very afternoon that Aunt Eliza chooses for coming over here, unless, indeed, she sends the carriage for me after morning church, with the expectation that I shall return to spend the afternoon in Queen's Gate !"

"Oh, bother, let her send !" cried Larry. "If you're out, you can't go ! Here, I'm not going to stand any nonsense of that sort, Joan ! You promised to come away with me from Saturday to Monday, and come you must and shall."

She did not look very horrified at the idea.

"But what on earth am I to say to aunt about it ? They're so ill-natured. They're

sure to put the worst construction on my absence !”

“Haven’t you any lady friend with whom you could tell them you were about to stay ?”

“There’s Mrs. Vivian at Richmond, if you think she would do ?”

“Any one will do, so long as there’s no chance of their coming after you ! Is Mrs. Vivian a visitor in Queen’s Gate ?”

“Oh no ; they don’t know her, even by sight.”

“Then she’ll do, beautifully ! And now for our destination. You said, if I remember rightly, let us go to a secluded place ; but, my dear girl, if you wish to do a thing *sub rosa*, a secluded place is the very devil, for if you *should* happen to meet an acquaintance, there’s no dodging them. Much better go to a crowded city if you want to escape observation. What do you say to Paris ?”

“Oh, Larry, it would take too long, and I am such a bad sailor !”

“Then *that* won’t do ! I don’t want to have you sick all the time ! Shall we go to Birmingham or one of the big central towns ?”

“What, in this weather, when it’s so hot !
“No ; let us have a breath of the sea ! How would Eastbourne do ?”

“Too fashionable, my dear ! You would meet half your acquaintances there—run down from Saturday to Monday, like ourselves. The

same objection applies to Brighton, but Hastings might do ! It's out of the season at Hastings ; still there will be plenty of people there, but not *your* people. I think we should be as safe at Hastings as anywhere !”

“Won't it be nice ?” sighed Joan. “We will spend each evening on the pier. I have felt so enervated lately. A few breezes will set me up !”

“And about rooms ? You won't go to an hotel ?”

“I'm afraid ! They put all the names down in a book. How should we call ourselves ? And wouldn't they think it very strange that a lady and gentleman not related to each other, should be traveling together ?”

“But we *must* be related ! We will travel as cousins—then, if it ever should leak out, we may find a loophole by which to escape. I will run down to-morrow, Joan, and engage rooms, and we will start by the twelve train on Saturday, eh ?”

“It will be lovely !” said Joan, smiling mischievously ; for the proposed scheme presented all the excitement of an illegal enjoyment to her, without any of the penalties—except that of being found out ! When she parted with her husband that evening, she promised him to be ready by the hour he had named on Saturday.

“And I will write a skilfully worded note

to Aunt Eliza, merely telling her I am going to pass the time with a friend. It will be soon enough to invent tarradiddles when I am questioned on the subject."

But Joan had reckoned without her host. As she entered the station at Charing Cross with Larry on the Saturday morning, she ran straight up against the "gusher" Miss Dudley, who buttonholed her at once.

"Oh, Miss Trevor! Is this really you? Where are you going?"

Joan, mindful only of the *ruse-de-guerre* which she and Larry had decided on in case of inquiry, answered hurriedly—

"Down to Richmond, to stay with my friend Mrs. Vivian," and attempted to pass on.

"Richmond!" exclaimed Miss Dudley; "but, my dear, you have come to the wrong station. You go to Richmond from Waterloo—unless you prefer the underground. And is that Mr. O'Donnell with you? Oh, how do you do? Have you come to see Miss Trevor off? But you're all wrong! You must go on to Waterloo."

"We know that perfectly well," replied O'Donnell, impatiently; "but I've called here *en passant* to make inquiries about some luggage. Good morning!"

"You go about your luggage and leave Miss Trevor to talk to me," cried the gusher,

playfully ; " I have some news for her. I had a letter from Cecily Crosbie yesterday, Miss Trevor, from Naples, and she is in perfect ecstasies with everything abroad, and she says Captain Crosbie is so sweet, she cannot think how she ever managed to live without him—and——"

" Yes, yes ; but if you will excuse me, Miss Dudley, I think I must go. You know I haven't much sympathy with all these ravings and love-makings."

" Yes; and I suppose Cecily was afraid on that account to treat you to a letter on the subject. But she says at the end, ' Mind you give my love to Miss Trevor when you see her, and tell her she is quite mistaken about marriage—that it is the most delightful thing in the world when you love a man, as I love my Charlie, and you don't know what life is until you've tried it.' "

" I'm sure I'm very glad that she is happy ; but I consider it quite a chance all the same. Good-by ! "

" But why are you in such a hurry ? Mr. O'Donnell hasn't come back yet ! By which train are you going down to Richmond ? "

" By the twelve, I think—I am not quite sure. Mr. O'Donnell said he would look it out for me," stammered Joan.

" Oh, you will never catch the twelve," said Miss Dudley, coolly, consulting the station

clock. "It only wants two minutes to the hour! You couldn't get from here to Waterloo in the time. Have you had your lunch?"

"Yes! No, I mean—I shall have that on arrival."

"Come over to the A B C shop and have some with me. I am just going there. I've been shopping all the morning and feel quite faint. Why not come?"

"No, thank you; I do not feel ready for lunch yet. Please go and have yours, Miss Dudley. Mr. O'Donnell may be detained some time," urged Joan.

"I think he might have left his own business till he had seen you into your train," said Miss Dudley. "It isn't like Larry—is it?—to keep a lady waiting for him."

Joan's eyes flashed with indignation.

"I was not aware that you were on such intimate terms with Mr. O'Donnell as to call him by his Christian name," she said grandly.

"Oh, every one calls him 'Larry'!" replied Miss Dudley. "He's the sort of man that always goes by a nickname—because he's so small, I suppose. Well, if you are really determined not to come I will be off to my lunch. Good-by. I shall look you up in your flat some day before long. You're always at home in the evenings, aren't you? Ta-ta." And Miss Dudley went at last.

As soon as she was out of sight, Joan went in search of her husband.

"Oh, Larry," she cried. "I thought she would never go! What an unfortunate *contretemps*. She'll tell the story all over town!"

"Beast!" said Larry, with fervor. "She has lost us our train, and there is not another till twelve-forty. You must come and have some lunch, my dearest. You are looking quite pale."

"Larry, do you think she will go and tell grandfather? It would be just like her! She's one of the greatest scandal-mongers in town!"

"And if she did, what matter? What can she say except that she met us together at the station. The general doesn't forbid your allowing a gentleman to see you into the train, I suppose?"

"But she looked so suspicious, and as if she didn't believe me. And it was stupid of me to mention Richmond. I might have known better; but her unexpected appearance flurried me so, I forgot what I was saying. Larry, this is a bad omen to occur at the very beginning, isn't it?"

"Not a bit of it. We must prepare ourselves for these occasional encounters, and be well armed with a mouthful of excuses. Don't look so frightened, Joan. It is not like you to feel fear. A glass of port wine will put a dif-

ferent complexion on the matter and turn Miss Dudley's appearance into an excellent joke !”

“I'm not frightened, Larry, but only trembling for my seven thousand a year. We must be 'more careful, dear. I should have let you come to the station alone and joined you afterwards.”

“No such thing ; I'm not going to let my wife knock about town by herself, when I am by to prevent it. Now for the first exercise of my marital authority ! Come along at once, and have some lunch.”

Joan was very thankful to be taken care of on this occasion, for she had had a great fright, though her reason told her it was foolish to make so much fuss about it. Her lunch revived her, and by the time they were in the twelve-forty train, she had forgotten all about the unlucky *rencontre* with Miss Dudley. It was a brilliant afternoon ; Hastings looked lovely and inviting under the sun of June ; the newly married couple felt almost as much alone as if they had found themselves on a desert island, and Joan felt sorry for the first time that she had not yielded to her husband's entreaties and gone down there under her married name. But it was too late to regret that now ; she had insisted that the rooms should be taken under separate names, and so the prim landlady was prepared to welcome

Miss Taylor and Mr. Donovan, her cousin, to her rigidly virtuous mansion for the space of two days, and had everything in readiness for their reception. The hours went rapidly. They spent all the afternoon and evening on the pier, listening to the band, and Joan was not angry, even when Larry squeezed her hand under cover of the darkness, or kissed her as they wandered on the beach.

"We can be as rational as we choose in town," she thought, as she blushed at her own weakness; "but just now, away from everybody, and the first time, too, it would be rather nasty to remind Larry of the conditions we have agreed to. He is awfully nice, there is no doubt of that; and I wish—oh, how I *do* wish—there were no horrid money in the way to prevent our going about openly like other married people! It does seem a nuisance to look forward to a long life of pretense!"

However, pretense for the time being it had to be, and Joan had drilled herself so well by bedtime, that when Mrs. Primmer, the landlady, came into the sitting-room the last thing to ask when Miss Taylor and Mr. Donovan would wish to be called the following morning, she did not even look surprised.

"Nine o'clock for me, if you please, Mrs. Primmer, and breakfast at ten."

"And the gentleman?" continued Mrs. Primmer.

"Oh, don't you call me at all!" replied Larry. "I'm dead beat, and mean to sleep as long as possible. Tell your slavey to bring up my shaving water when I ring, and not before, or she'll get something thrown at her head!"

"Very good, sir," said the landlady. "I suppose Miss Taylor would like a cup of tea at nine o'clock—most ladies do."

"Yes, please," replied Joan; "strong, and no sugar."

So, with a stiff "Good night," Mrs. Primmer left them to their own devices. The bedrooms were large, and situated next to one another, so they believed they had entirely secured themselves from discovery, and went up-stairs as soon as the other inmates of the house had retired to rest.

The next morning, Joan was startled by a loud rapping at the door. She had been lying awake for some time, watching Larry's boyish face upon the pillow beside her, and the bedroom door was fast locked, yet the loud rapping brought her heart into her mouth, as it is technically termed. She leapt out of bed, and threw her dressing-gown about her, as she exclaimed, in a hurried, nervous voice—

"Who's there?—who's there?"

"The tea and hot water, if you please, mum!" replied the slavey, who had waited on them the day before.

"Very well; you can leave them there. I

will fetch them for myself," said Mrs. O'Donnell with unnecessary fervor.

She waited until the servant's heavy footsteps could be heard traversing the lower passage, and then, opening the door with strange caution, she peeped out; gave vent to a slight exclamation, and, closing it hurriedly again, sunk back on the bed with a face as white as ashes.

"Why, what's the matter?" whispered Larry, who had also waked by this time. "What's wrong, Joan?"

She turned a supernaturally grave countenance upon him.

"Larry," she articulated, "we are lost—undone! There are *two* cups of tea upon the doormat!"

Her tone and look were so tragic, that O'Donnell could not help laughing.

"By Jove! You don't say so! How ever did the old cat find us out? I locked my bedroom door on the outside, and have the key with me—they can't have looked in there."

"Larry, don't joke about it, for goodness' sake!" said his wife. "My heart has stopped beating; I am so frightened! What on earth are we to do?"

"Frightened of an old toad of a landlady? Nonsense, my darling! What does it signify what she thinks, or doesn't think? We are

only Miss Taylor and Mr. Donovan to her, remember !”

“But the disgrace—the horror of it !” moaned poor Joan. “I can never face her again, Larry. I shall scramble on my things, and go back to London by the first train !”

“You will do no such thing, my dear. You don’t know these seaside landladies. They’re used to these little escapades ! It’s as much as their bread is worth to take any notice of them. Get in the tea and hot water, like a sensible girl, and think no more about it. I dare say it was a mistake, after all. Wait till I’m safe in my own room, and then ring your bell and ask the slavey what she meant by bringing you two cups of tea instead of one ? Put a bold face upon the matter—act on the defensive—that’s the best way of getting out of a scrape !”

“I wish I had never got into one !” said Joan.

“Don’t say that ! We’ll manage better next time—and remember it’s Miss Taylor’s ‘piccadilly’ and not yours !”

“Poor Miss Taylor !” replied Joan, with a watery smile, as she closed the door upon her husband, and hoped they might hear no more of the matter, and that it had been, as Larry had suggested, a mistake !

But they were not to get off so easily. They were taking their breakfast together,

glancing rather guiltily at one another every now and then, when a tap at the door announced the advent of Mrs. Primmer, who entered the room, clad in Sunday garb, and looking too eminently respectable for anything. Her hands were folded in the most elegant fashion over her black silk apron, as she said in tones of ice—

“You will pardon my putting the question, Miss Taylor; but, are you married to this gentleman?”

Joan was about to answer yes; but Larry stopped the word upon her very tongue.

“And, pray, what business is that of yours?” he asked the landlady.

“Every business, sir! My house has always been strictly respectable—and no ladies are admitted here, unless they bear a respectable character!”

Larry swore a round oath at her at once.

“How dare you say anything or think anything otherwise of my cousin? Leave the room at once! I have hired these rooms; and whilst I remain in them they are mine; and you will be good enough to rid them of your presence!”

“Excuse me, sir,” retorted Mrs. Primmer, with aggravating politeness; “but I have every right to inquire the character of my lodgers. When you engaged my rooms, you gave me to understand you wanted them for your cousin,

an unmarried lady, and yourself ; but you deceived me, sir, and I must request that you will leave my house as soon as possible, for you get no more meals served here, nor yet anything else ! ”

During this discussion, Joan had been in an agony of fear and apprehension, and now that it was ended, she appealed to her husband with wide-opened eyes.

“ Oh, Larry, pray tell her the truth ! I cannot bear it any longer. Let her know who we are ! ”

“ Perhaps it would be better,” he replied. “ Well, Mrs. Primmer, since you have discovered what we particularly desired to conceal from you, you force me to tell you that this lady is my wife—so that your suspicions of impropriety are unnecessary ! ”

“ Miss Taylor is your wife ! ” repeated the landlady in an incredulous tone.

“ Yes ! We have been married privately and did not wish to disclose the fact just yet ; but as you have found us out, it is due to you to tell the truth.”

“ I do not believe it ! ” replied the landlady.

“ Damn it all,” cried Larry, furiously, “ what do you mean ? I tell you it is so—that this lady is my wife, Mrs. O'Donnell—I mean, Mrs. Donovan ; and we took your rooms under our separate names, because we

wished to keep our marriage a secret for the present ! ”

“ Then, sir, I should advise you not to try and impose upon respectable church-going people any more until you *can* reveal it ! I’ve had many a lady and gentleman—*real* ladies and gentlemen—in my house before to-day ; but never respectable married couples as were ashamed to say they were such, or had to resort to false names and subterfuge in order to gain their way. It’s most underhand, not to say demoralizing for me and mine, and I must repeat that I can’t harbor such any longer, and you must quit my house as soon as your breakfast is over ! A married woman indeed ! ” said Mrs. Primmer, as a parting shot, as she turned about and sailed from the apartment.

“ Larry, what *are* we to do ? ” exclaimed Joan as soon as they were alone.

“ No difficulty about settling that, dear,” he answered cheerfully ; “ we’ll clear out and go to the hotel. I wish we had done so at once ! ”

“ But, Larry, if it should prove a repetition of this ! ” said his wife, piteously. “ I’ve never been insulted in my life before ! I didn’t know it would feel half so bad. To be suspected of such things—I feel as if I could tear the woman’s eyes out ! ”

“ So do I ; but I’m afraid that, in the cir-

cumstances, we must try and get used to such things. These people's minds are so coarse that they are always on the lookout for scandal. But I could cut my throat to think I should have subjected you to such an insult, my peerless girl."

"Never mind," said Joan, caressingly. "It's not Joan Trevor who has been insulted, remember—only Miss Taylor, who may be a little milliner or anybody; so we won't cry over her!"

"*You* a milliner? You look very like it, don't you?" said Larry, proudly, as he threw his arm around her slim waist. "You look more like a princess of the blood-royal, my Joan. But how can such a vulgar old toad like that be expected to discriminate? Never mind; run up-stairs and pack your bag whilst I settle with Mrs. Primmer, and then we'll be off in search of 'fresh fields and pastures new.'"

"But, Larry," said Joan, as he was about to leave her, "I feel rather nervous of encountering a second shock like this one! Don't you think that it might be better perhaps to call ourselves by the same name at the hotel?"

"Well said!" cried Larry. "I was just about to propose it. I'll book as Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and we'll have a private sitting-room and take our meals alone. But we must be

very careful, Joan, for if any one recognized us and found we had booked under a false name, all the fat would be in the fire ! ”

“ Our path seems strewn with thorns,” sighed his wife ; “ I never thought it would be so difficult to get married and keep it a secret. I shall be afraid to go out of doors till we start for town again ! ”

“ You make too much of it. This old beast has given you a regular fright. Tie a thick veil over your face when you go out and keep up your sunshade, and it’ll be all right. My dear child, it’s done every day when the consequences of discovery would be far more fatal than in our case. *Sursum corda !* sweetheart ! Run away and put your traps together. and wait for me outside the house. I’ll take good care Mrs. Primmer doesn’t speak to you again ! ”

In a few minutes, true to his word, Larry, armed with their two Gladstones, joined her on the parade and they walked off to the hotel together, and booked their names as Mr. and Mrs. Smith. They procured a nice cosy little sitting-room looking on the sea, and were congratulating themselves on having got out of the clutches of Mrs. Primmer, when the door was suddenly flung open to admit a lady, and gentleman.

“ These are the rooms, sir ! ” ejaculated the waiter who showed them in. But the strangers

did not advance beyond the threshold, but stood there and stared.

"Hullo!" said the man. "These rooms are occupied!" And then, catching sight of O'Donnell, he continued, "Why, Larry old boy," and thereupon retreated and said no more.

"Hammond, by Jove!" exclaimed Larry, as he sprung after him. The two men met in the corridor.

"Deucedly sorry, old fellow!" said Mr. Hammond; "but it was the waiter's fault!"

"I was told these rooms were booked for Mr. and Mrs. Smith, sir," interposed the waiter, apologetically.

"And so they were. It's all right," said Larry. "But you, Hammond——"

"Here, go and engage me another sitting-room," said Hammond to the waiter; and then, turning to O'Donnell, he continued confidentially—

"This is a farce, my dear Larrikins—the two Dromios. You see, I'm down here with——" at this juncture he winked his eye towards the lady who stood a little apart in the shadow—"you understand, and booked our names as Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and now I find that you, you dog"—with a dig in Larry's ribs—"have done the same—rather a coincidence, isn't it? However, we shan't interfere with each other any more. How long shall you be here?"

"Only till to-morrow," stammered Larry, not knowing what explanation to give of his appearance.

"Ah, just my case. It runs into quite enough 'oof' as it is. Well, ta-ta, old fellow. I fancy we can do without each other's company till we meet again in town. The two Mr. and Mrs. Smiths! Ha! ha! ha! This will make a rare joke for the club, won't it? Good-by!"

"But, Hammond—wait a moment—it isn't just what you imagine. My friend——"

"Oh yes; we've heard that before, old man! I hardly saw her face, on my word of honor, and I won't look if we should happen to meet on the pier; so don't sully that honest little tongue of yours with any tarradiddles. Ta-ta! My best compliments to Mrs. Smith. Ha! ha! ha!" and Mr. Hammond joined the friend who waited for him in the shadow.

Larry returned to Joan in a depressed state of mind, though he wouldn't let her perceive it. He calmed her fears by telling her that Hammond was a very slight acquaintance of his, whom he was unlikely to meet again, and that he had quite disabused his mind of any notion regarding herself.

"Didn't he see me, then?" she inquired earnestly.

"No, darling, or only the back of your head, if he did. I believe he mistook you for one of the chamber-maids, for he asked if I was up

to any of my old games. He knows nothing of you. You needn't think twice about that, I assure you."

"Is Mr. Hammond married? There was a lady with him," said Joan.

"I believe so. Most men are married, you know; but I have never inquired particularly into his domestic affairs. But we don't want to talk of Hammond or any of that ilk, on this our first real wedding-day, do we? So let us decide what we are going to do this afternoon. I think the best plan will be to get a carriage and drive out to the Fairies' Glen and other spots of interest. The country is lovely round about Hastings. Come, Joan, let us try and forget everything but that we are together and out on a holiday!"

Nothing further transpired to discompose Mr. and Mrs. Smith during the rest of their stay, but the next morning, as they were journeying back to town, Larry saw Joan turning over the contents of her Gladstone bag as though she were searching for something.

"What is it, dear?" he inquired. "Have you lost anything?"

The eyes she lifted to his face were full of suppressed horror.

"Larry," she whispered, in tones of awe, "I have left my card-case with my name and address on the cards, behind me at—Mrs. Primmer's!"

CHAPTER V.

As soon as the excitement, consequent upon their stolen honeymoon, was over, and Mr. and Mrs. O'Donnell had once more settled down in their separate apartments in town, they found that they did not see much more of each other than they had done before the marriage.

The wedding-ring lay concealed in Joe's bosom, and Larry strutted about his office and his clubs in the character of a bachelor. His rooms were in the Strand, and it was not worth his while to run over to Chelsea, unless he could spend an hour or two with his wife. On many occasions, too, it was impossible for him to spare the time. There were certain nights on which the press "went to bed," and his presence was required to see the sheets rolled off for the morning issue. First nights and first appearances claimed his constant attendance at the various theaters, for it was the height of the season, and the journalists' hands were full. Political meetings, dog and cattle shows; society doings and society functions were so continuous and engrossing, that

Larry began to look quite pale and very much like "a man about Town." Then there were dinners, which it was politic of him to attend, and smoking concerts, from which he had never been absent before, and at which his absence would have provoked inquiry ; so that, with one thing and another, Joan sometimes thought they might as well have dispensed with that ceremony at the registrar's office, which had borne such paltry fruit. For her own part, she kept on steadily working away in the service of Lord Mauleverer, whose demands upon her energy became more engrossing as the sessions drew nearer their close. But every day's work was lightened by the hope that Larry would spend the evening with her. The first thing that Joan did on reaching her flat each afternoon was to scan the letter-rack eagerly for a trace of Larry's writing. And she always found a message from him, by note or telegram. If he were coming to tea, how quickly she ran up-stairs, joy in her eyes and her heart, to get all things in readiness to greet her lord and master ; but if the note or wire said "Impossible ! Shall be detained till midnight," the girl would creep up the long flight of stone steps as if all the power had deserted her limbs and she could never reach the top. Then there would ensue a long, weary evening, without sight or sound of Larry, and, as often

as not, proud Joan would dissolve into tears, and wish she had never been so foolish as to consent to this rational marriage, which affected her so irrationally. Had Larry and she been like other husbands and wives, she told herself, however late he were detained by office or club, she would know that he would return home at last, and forget his worries or his weariness in her arms, until the morning took him forth to his labors again. But now she didn't know if he were enjoying himself or otherwise, if he were well or ill, fresh or tired; everybody else connected with him knew more about him than she did. It was rather hard, and no good being his wife at all at this rate. Some words which she had almost forgotten came into Joan's mind at the thought. "The mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity." She hardly remembered where she had heard them, but she knew they were not her own. But what help or comfort could she and Larry be to one another if they were sick or sorry? Who would write and tell her if anything happened to her dear little man—an accident, a sudden sickness, or a crushing trouble? No one, she supposed; how should they, since no one had been told that she was the nearest creature to him all in the world. Well, it was ridiculous to cry over it; it had been her own choice, her

own decision, and she must abide by the consequences. She wouldn't give up Larry, now she had got him, for all the world ; but neither could she give up the prospect of that seven thousand a year, which any weakness on her part would forfeit. So, when she was most disappointed by her husband's non-appearance, she would console herself by planning how they would spend that fortune when it became theirs, where they would live, what they would do, and what a lovely lazy life she would be able to make for Larry (who was an indolent varlet, and preferred the sofa to any other resting-place) when the necessity for work should be over for them both. Meanwhile they had mutually agreed that outward appearances must be strictly observed, and one of the chief of these was Joan's acceptance of the invitations to spend Sunday afternoons in Queen's Gate. This was a frightful sacrifice on the altar of Mammon, for Sundays were the only days that they could confidently depend upon for meeting ; still it was unavoidable, and Joan had to subsist on the expectations of the evening.

A few Sundays after she had been to Hastings she went over to General Steele's house as a matter of course. Sunday was a terrible day in Queen's Gate. Aunt Eliza ruled the house, and every servant was bound under the conditions of her engagement to attend

church twice a day, which regulation left the establishment without service for the better part of the time. Miss Steele guided the phalanx to morning and evening service, but in the afternoon they were left to take care of themselves, though strictly catechised as to the words of the text and the nature of the discourse as soon as they returned home. During the afternoon, when an early dinner had rendered the members of the family very somnolent, they sat in the library, a dark, cheerless-looking room at the back of the house, where the general and his sister occupied two armchairs on either side the fireplace, and usually slept soundly till tea-time, whilst Amelia James and her cousin Joan conversed in whispers on the sofa, and turned over the Sunday papers and magazines. After she had been to Hastings, Joan found her cousin all curiosity to learn where she had been and what she had been doing. Amelia, who was a cowardly and timid girl, entirely under her aunt Eliza's sway, but not above or beyond doing sly and deceitful things when there was no likelihood of discovery, sat close to Joan and whispered in her ear, whilst her watery blue eyes twinkled with curiosity.

"Now, Joan, do tell me everything! It has been so horribly dull here all the week. I have asked aunt twice to let me go and see you, but she refused. How I wish you had

never left us ! It was twice as pleasant whilst you were at home ! ”

“ Thank you for saying so, Amelia ; but I have found it twice as pleasant since I have been away. Aunt Eliza’s opinions and mine do not agree—you know that—and at two-and-twenty I think a woman should be allowed to judge for herself ! ”

“ But now about Richmond ! What did you do there ? ”

“ Heaps of things ! Walked about and enjoyed the sea air—I mean the country air—and talked and—and—well ! just about the same as you were doing here ! ”

“ Were any gentlemen there ? ”

“ Yes ! ”

“ Was Mr. O’Donnell—the gentleman we met at your place, you know ? ”

“ What on earth put him into your head, Mealy ? ”

“ Oh, I think he *is* so nice—and so good-looking ! I do wish Aunt Eliza would ask him to come here. And he’s an author, too, isn’t he ? He has written a book—how clever he must be ! ”

“ Not necessarily, Mealy ! But he *is* clever, decidedly. He was correspondent during the Matabele war, and his sketches were all published in the *Mirror*. ”

“ And he draws, too ! How nice ! Do you know him *very* well, Joan ? ”

"Pretty well!" replied Joan, with pursed-up lips.

"Couldn't you get him to go to your flat and then ask me to come too? I *should* love to meet him again. He was so agreeable. Even Aunt Eliza said he was quite a gentleman!"

"I'm sure I feel much obliged to Aunt Eliza," said Joan, haughtily. "She might have known, I should think, that she would meet none but gentlemen in my rooms!"

"But do you often have gentlemen to call and see you, Joan? How delightful it must be to be able to ask any one you choose without leave!"

"Yes, I know a good many men. There's Captain Hildyard and Mr. Henniker—Willie Henniker brought me the most lovely flowers yesterday afternoon; but I told him he mustn't do it again!"

"Why not?" ask Mealy, with open eyes.

"Oh, well, because—I don't know exactly—only it's better for a girl not to favor one man more than another, isn't it? Grandfather might not approve of you or me having too many intimate friends of the other sex, eh, Mealy?"

"Oh, wouldn't he make a row! He gave me a jobation of two hours' length the other day because he said I talked too familiarly with the footman, though I was only directing

him how to clean my jewelry ! As if I would run away with a servant like Aurora Floyd ! ”

“ Dear me ; he’s almost enough to make you do so ! But keep up your heart, Mealy ! He can’t live forever ! ”

“ That’s what Anne, my maid, says. Only I’m awfully afraid, Joan, that he may leave us as a sort of legacy to Aunt Eliza in his will, so that she may carry on the same game with us ! ”

Joan grew quite pale at the idea.

“ Good heavens ! I never thought of that ! ” she gasped. “ Amelia, I do believe, if it were to come to pass, that I should poison her ! ”

“ Oh, hush, Joan—hush ! ” said her cousin. “ One never knows if she is asleep or awake. She pretends to be asleep sometimes, so as to overhear what people say about her and grand-papa ! She has engaged such an awful-looking maid, just like a murderess ! ”

“ Has she replaced Ellis already ? What is she like ? ”

“ My dear girl, you never saw such a woman. A great coarse creature much more like a man, with bony arms and hands and huge feet ! ”

“ Where did she get her from ? ”

“ Heaven knows ! You know how queer aunt is ! She was poking about in some poor person’s cottage, I believe, when she came across this griffin. She is about six foot high and has a voice like a bull. ”

"What was it in her that took aunt's fancy?"

"Because she says that she hates all men (this woman, I mean), and has never been kissed!"

At that Joan's soft laughter floated through the room, though she held her handkerchief against her mouth.

"Don't, don't, Joan, or she'll wake, and I shall not be able to tell you any more. I happened to be in the room when this ogre called on aunt to be submitted to a catechism respecting her past and present. She has never been out in service before, but felt sure that she could readily learn anything Aunt Eliza might teach her. 'I don't care,' said aunt, 'half so much about what you can *do* as about what you *are*! Now, tell me truthfully, have you ever kept company (as it is called) with a man?' 'Never, mum!' said the ogre. 'Nor wished to do so?' continued aunt. 'No,' was the reply; 'I 'ates 'em like pison, and don't wish never to 'ave hanythink to do with 'em.' 'You have no desire for marriage, then?' was the next question. 'Lor, mum!' cried the elegant creature, with horror. 'Marriage! Hit's my *ab-borrence*!' 'You will just suit me,' said Aunt Eliza; 'if you are obedient and willing, we shall get on perfectly together. Your duties will lie entirely with me, and you need see nothing of the men-servants at all.



If you prefer it, I will even permit you to take your meals alone in your work-room.' And so I suppose the wretch will do ! ”

“ But aunt must be *mad*,” whispered Joan earnestly, “ to engage a woman she knows so little about and appoint her to look after herself and her property. She may rob the house.”

“ I suggested that it was rather rash in her ; but she quailed me with a glance. ‘ You have no knowledge of such things, Amelia,’ she said. ‘ How should you have ? This woman is just what I require ; good, pure, and innocent. She is rather rough, I acknowledge ; how much better thus than that her mind should be filled with men and love-making and marriage, like that immoral creature Ellis. You heard her say that she had never been kissed ! How refreshing it sounded. With the exception of myself, I have never met a woman of her age—thirty, I think she said—who had passed through life with such purity of intention and demeanor ! ’ Joan, don’t make such a noise, for goodness’ sake, or you will spoil everything ! ”

Joan wiped her streaming eyes.

“ I shall go into hysterics in a minute,” she said. “ Mealy, I never knew you could be so amusing. And is this pure creature already established in the house ? I should love to see her ! A woman who has reached the age

of thirty and never been kissed is an anomaly. How very unappetizing she must be!"

"She is—she is!" replied Mealy. "With a red, rough skin, and a lot of blotches on her nose. And such little piggy eyes. I saw her wince when I looked hard at her, and aunt ascribed it to her modesty, and said I ought to have been ashamed of myself. But she is not here yet, Joan! Ellis's month will not be up for another week. I believe aunt wished her new paragon to come to her first at Belstone Castle, where the sweet, modest creature will not be subjected so much to the rude gaze of man as here!"

"But are you going to Belstone soon, Mealy?"

"I believe we are to go down there for a few weeks, at all events. Grandpapa fancies he has influenza, or some such rubbish, and must try country air to shake it off. I wish you were coming too, Joan!"

"I could not possibly leave town till Parliament is over, or I should lose my appointment with Lord Mauleverer. When he goes, I shall have a month's holiday. But I am not sure where I shall spend it yet."

"Bother the tea! Here it comes!" said Amelia. "Joan, have you seen Mr. O'Donnell lately?"

"My dear child, how you do harp on Mr. O'Donnell! I hope you're not going to get

spooney on him, for it will be no use if you do ! ”

“ But why not—he’s not engaged, is he ? ” demanded Amelia, anxiously.

“ Not that I am aware of ; but he has no money, and he’s not a marrying man ! ”

“ How do you know that ? I saw him with a very pretty girl the other day.”

“ Where ? ” cried Joan, firing up.

“ In the Strand. Aunt and I were driving to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and as we went through the Strand I saw Mr. O’Donnell with a young lady ! ”

“ What was she like ? ” exclaimed Joan, hastily.

“ Fair, with yellow hair, and a slight figure. I couldn’t see her face very well, as we passed them rapidly ; but she looked very nice, and she was hanging on his arm and looking up in his face in a very winning way. But if he is not engaged——”

“ He is not engaged ; it’s all rubbish,” said Joan, decidedly. “ But he is coming to see me to-morrow, and I shall——”

“ Amelia, my love, be good enough to pour out the tea for your grandpapa and myself,” said Aunt Eliza, who had roused from her sleep and was sitting upright in her arm-chair. Joan, with a very flushed face and unusual shortness of temper, assisted her cousin to dispense the hospitalities of the tea-table, and

as soon as it was over, she put on her hat, and, saying she had a headache, announced her intention of going home. She was longing to get back and demand an explanation from Larry of the existence of the girl with yellow hair, whom Mealy had seen hanging on his arm in so unauthorized a manner.

"Going so soon, my dear?" ejaculated her aunt. "Why, it is only half-past five. If you will stay another half-hour, Mr. Pawkins promised to look in and give us a reading from Ecclesiastes."

"No, thank you, Aunt Eliza, I cannot possibly stay. I have some work to do which is unavoidable."

"Work on Sunday evening, my dear! Surely that is hardly necessary!"

"Yes, it is, and will take me some time; so I must go at once. Good-night, grandfather. I hope your influenza will soon be better. Good-night, all."

"Oh, Joan, if you are really going back so soon, I shall walk with you. I haven't had a breath of fresh air all day."

"Amelia, I am surprised at you!" exclaimed Miss Steele. "How can you walk back alone? You forget yourself!"

"I will take Ellis with me, aunt. Poor Ellis! She is so cut up at your dismissal of her, and she is longing to show me her own little chapel where she always goes in the evenings."

"Well, if Ellis really shows such a sense of her wrong-doing, and wishes to expiate her fault by true repentance, I can have no objection to your accompanying her to chapel, if you will return home immediately afterwards. But is the chapel in the same direction as your cousin's flat?"

"Yes, aunt; just at the corner of the street. Wait a minute for me, Joan. I shall not be long."

She flew from the room as she spoke, leaving her cousin in a state of dismay at her proposal, for she confidently expected Larry to spend the evening with her, and the presence of Amelia would prove most obnoxious to them both. But she could hardly object to what Aunt Eliza had sanctioned, and so she took her leave and walked for a little while outside the house waiting for Amelia, who presently joined her from a side door.

"Where is Ellis?" asked Joan as her cousin came up with her.

Amelia laughed in her sly way.

"Goodness knows! Probably with some other man's arm round her waist by this time!"

"Do you mean it was only a hoax, Mealy?"

"Of course. Did you think I was in earnest? Why on earth should I want Ellis prying after everything I do or say?"

"But why tell a falsehood about it? Far

better defy Aunt Eliza, and say you will have your own way, than stoop to lie to her !”

“That may be all very well for you, Joan, who have kicked over the traces ; but for poor me, who am like a mouse in the claws of a cat, there is no escape but through subterfuge.”

“Well, I’m sorry you care to deceive them ; but I don’t want you at my flat to-night, Mealy, and that’s the truth ! My time is fully occupied. I have none just now in which to chatter to you ! Haven’t you said all you want to say to me ?”

“Well, yes, perhaps ; but why can’t I stay with you a little time, all the same ? Is there any one there whom you don’t want me to see ?”

Joan turned cold. Was there any one there whom she did not wish Mealy to see, when she was looking forward with feverish anticipation to meeting Larry, to whom she had confided the duplicate latch-key of her little flat ? What was she to say ? Her honest heart revolted from telling a downright falsehood, such as she had just rebuked in her cousin. So, after a pause, she answered—

“I don’t know—I am not sure ! Mr. O’Donnell and I are busy just now over some literary work, and he might—indeed, I am sure he intends to call on me this evening.”

“Mr. O’Donnell !” exclaimed Amelia, eagerly

"Oh, Joan, *do* let me stay with you ! I won't disturb you in the least ! I'll be as quiet as a mouse. I shall be quite satisfied if I may only look at him."

"What do you want to look at him for ?" cried Joan, firing up. "What is Mr. O'Donnell to you ?"

"Nothing, of course ! I wish he were ! But he is so nice, his voice is so sweet, and his smile—oh, I think his smile is heavenly ! And such godlike eyes ! I don't think I ever saw a man I liked so much before !"

"Well, the sooner you leave off liking him the better," replied Joan, curtly, "for he is not at all likely to take any notice of you ! The absurdity of it—when you have only seen the man once. I'm ashamed of you, Mealy."

"But he is so nice," repeated Miss James, when her attention was diverted by the appearance of Miss Dudley.

The cousins had come in sight of Joan's flat by this time, and outside the building, walking slowly up and down, was the "gusher."

"Ah, here you are !" she exclaimed, as she caught sight of them ; "I said I should look you up some Sunday evening, you know, Miss Trevor, and I've been waiting here for an hour ! I'm so glad you have come at last !"

Joan's greeting was almost rudely constrained.

"It is quite a chance that you had not to

wait till midnight, Miss Dudley, for I am hardly ever at home on Sundays!"

"Indeed, I thought it was your regular receiving-day. Captain Hildyard told me so!"

"Without my authority though," replied Joan; "I prefer to keep my Sundays as days of rest, and the only place I go to is my grandfather's in Queen's Gate. And this evening, I regret to say, I shall be particularly engaged."

"But you won't refuse to give me a cup of tea, I'm sure," pleaded the gusher, "for I'm quite worn out waiting for your return!"

"Come in, then," said Joan, who felt as if she were surrounded by spies, and was vainly trying to concoct some valid reason for finding Larry comfortably ensconced in her arm-chair smoking a pipe, with a bottle of Bass by his side. What awful scandal might these two curious females not propagate concerning her? It was a relief to see a note in her husband's handwriting awaiting her in the rack in the hall. She seized it eagerly. Only two lines—"My own darling, Marston is taken ill, and Scagwell has put me on the dress rehearsal at the Savoy instead. Beastly bore; but can't help it! *a demain!* Your own, Larry." At any other time it would have been a great disappointment, but with Miss Dudley and Amelia clamoring for admittance, she thanked Heaven who had spared her. A visiting-card was also in the rack for her. "Captain W.

Hildyard, Twentieth Hussars." So he had called also, and yet she was reduced for companionship to the two gushers. She was disgusted, but she felt relieved. Her voice had taken quite a different tone as she ejaculated, "Come along, then, and let me see what I can do for you! You must put up with pot-luck, Miss Dudley! I have been taking tea at grandfather's, and hardly know if I have any bread and butter left."

"Oh, we shall do admirably well, I am sure!" returned Miss Dudley; and Mealy, who had not been told that all her hopes respecting Mr. O'Donnell were at an end, waltzed up the stone stairs as if some great happiness awaited her at the top.

But the little sitting-room was empty of everything but its furniture.

"Mr. O'Donnell has not come yet, Joan!" she said, as she entered it.

"No, nor will he be here this evening. I have just had a note from him to say he is detained. That's the pleasure of being a press-writer, at the beck and call of everybody!"

"Oh, I *am* sorry!" said Amelia plaintively.

"Was Larry going to spend the evening with you all alone?" asked Miss Dudley, inquisitively. "You seem to be great friends! By the way, how did you get on the day I met you at Charing Cross going down to Richmond? How I laughed afterwards at the recol-

lection ! I should think Larry might have known better than that ! His head must have been a bit turned by something or other ! ”

“ I thought,” said Joan, in her coldest voice, “ that Mr. O'Donnell made it quite plain to you that he had called at Charing Cross in order to inquire after a box which they had neglected to forward ? ”

“ Oh yes ; I believe he did say something of the sort, but I gave no credence to it ! Men *are* such story-tellers ! They will say anything to get out of a scrape ! ”

“ I was not aware that Mr. O'Donnell *was* in a scrape ? ” remarked Joan, still severely proper.

“ Ah, my dear,” replied the gusher, in an offensively familiar manner, “ you have a lot to learn yet—and one thing is to tell a lie and stick to it ! Now, don't look so terribly offended ! We girls all have our little games, you know, and it is only natural that we should wish to keep them to ourselves ! By the way, I've had another letter from Cecily Crosbie, and they are to be home next week.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Joan, who was busy with making the water boil for tea.

“ Yes ; and she is delighted at the idea of coming amongst her old chums again in her new character ! She *is* so happy. Captain Crosbie is going to take a little house for her as near to Mrs. Ponsonby's as they can

manage. Won't it be delightful for Cecily, able to see her dear mother every day! How I envy her. Don't you?"

"I can't say I do," replied Joan; "I know what these little houses in Bayswater mean—small rooms; all the new furniture smelling of varnish; two young servants; and everything going wrong! Sooner Mrs. Crosbie than I."

"I'm afraid you're jealous, Miss Trevor. You'll acknowledge, though, that Captain Crosbie is a very good-looking man."

"Certainly! And so are dozens of young men who walk up and down Westbourne Grove every day. What is there in that? Do you think that a handsome face constitutes happiness?"

"Oh no! But he has decided to leave the army. He will be always with her."

Joan shrugged her shoulders.

"*Tant pis!* She will be all the sooner sick of him. A retired army man is the worst sort of man in the world to set up house with. He never knows what to do with himself. He seldom has any resource beyond his profession. He has been bred in indolence and accustomed to be directed in all things, so he has forgotten how to think for himself. You could hardly find a stupider companion than a retired officer. They only know how to read the newspaper and play billiards."

"You seem to know a lot about it," said Miss Dudley, who had got her cup of tea by this time, and was sipping it gingerly.

"Not personally, but I have watched the results. My friend, Audrey Langston, was delighted when her husband sold out, and has regretted it ever since. She says she could never have imagined a man could be such an awful nuisance. When he was attached to his corps, his military duties took him away for more than half the day, and the spring and autumn maneuvers were a holy relief ; but now, he sits at home, morning, noon, and night, and has to invent diseases in order to keep his mind employed upon something. Audrey assured me that he has had (or thinks he has had) every complaint under the sun since his retirement, and spends his time and his money in going about from doctor to doctor, and place to place, in order to cure himself of what he does not possess. Thank Heaven that has not sent such a husband my way ! I should have been hanged for murder before now. It would have been impossible for me to live with him. Either he or myself would have had to go, and I should have preferred it to be him."

"Well, upon my word, you are the very queerest girl I ever came across," said the gusher. "I believe you positively hate men. I wonder you ever let one enter your flat !"

"I seldom do!" replied Joan, with a grimace.

"Except Larry O'Donnell," remarked her friend, slyly.

Joan reddened, and then hated herself for doing so.

"I cannot imagine," she said, with a heated countenance, "why you will all fix upon that unfortunate little man to joke me about. If you *must* have a target for your wit, why not choose some one taller and better-looking; like Captain Hildyard, for instance. *There* is a good-looking man, if you like. But poor little O'Donnell——"

"The best goods are sometimes packed in the smallest parcels, you know, Miss Trevor."

"Well, it strikes me this is very foolish and idle talk. Have you nothing more to tell me about Cecily Crosbie, Miss Dudley?"

"Only that she seems to be superlatively happy. Captain Crosbie waits upon her like a slave."

"A dignified position for a man who calls himself her lord and master," remarked Joan.

"Ah, I don't suppose it will be like that forever, of course; but it must be very nice at first! He even insists upon unlacing her boots and——"

"And her stays," said Joan, with a curled lip.

"Oh, Miss Trevor ; how *can* you ?" cried the gusher.

"Have I said anything improper ? Audrey told me that her husband use to undress her and put her to bed when they were first married, and now, she has to ring the bell and fetch his slippers, and generally transform herself into waitress, head nurse, and bottle-washer. And you call that happiness—ugh !"

"And what is *your* idea of happiness, then, Joan ?" asked Mealy.

"Perfect liberty, my dear—no interference, no orders, and no tomfoolery ! The right to close and lock my door as I will ; to come and go without question ; and to choose my own associates and employments. Certainly *not* to wait upon the pleasure of a man and get kicked for my pains."

"Ah, you don't know what *love* means !" sighed Mealy, plaintively.

"And do you ?"

"No ; but I've read of it. Don't you remember in The 'Newcomes,' how happy Clive and Ethel were, and what a lovely wedding they had at the end ?"

"Yes, that's just the mistake of novels, Mealy—the lovely wedding comes at the end, just where the misery begins. The surgeon stops dead there—smiling at you with the knife concealed in his hand—he won't let you

see any further, for fear you should shrink from the operation."

"Well, *you'll* never marry, that's certain," said Miss Dudley, as she rose to go ; "but I think you're mistaken all the same. Marriage *may* turn out to be not all roses ; but a single life is pretty sure to have no comfort in it. It's all very well whilst you are young, and have plenty of friends ; but just fancy how wretched it would be to grow old and hideous and have no one to care if you lived or died."

"Better than to have some one who was longing for you to die and give him the chance of getting a younger and prettier successor."

"Well, you are incorrigible, so I shall go," said Miss Dudley, rising to her feet. As she did so, she dragged a corner of the table-cloth and upset a little tazza, which emptied its contents upon the table. "Hullo !" she exclaimed ; "why, what is this ? Cigar ash ! Miss Trevor, if you have an objection to a husband *in esse*, you apparently do not carry out your sentiments with regard to one *in posse*. Whose cigar ashes are these ?"

Joan colored again, but was quite ready with her explanation.

"Any one's and every one's, Miss Dudley, though I hope you won't repeat the statement to my revered grandfather, who is very particular as to what friends I receive. But you must be aware that in my profession (for I do

a little penny-a-lining myself), I have often to see my *confrères* in literature and art, and I really haven't the heart to make them put out their beloved pipes for my sake. Some men can't talk without smoking."

Miss Dudley elevated her eyebrows, but said no more.

"Well, good evening, and many thanks for your delicious tea. So few women know how to make good tea. My compliments to Larry when next you see him, and tell the gentleman who leaves his ashes on your pretty tablecloth to be more careful next time. Good-by!" and so she took herself and her careless tongue downstairs again.

"And now, Amelia, you had better follow suit," said Joan, "for *I* cannot walk back all the way to Queen's Gate with you, and do not like the responsibility of keeping you here any later. And, mind, if Aunt Eliza finds you out, you must tell your own story, please, and not lay the blame upon me!"

Amelia took her departure very humbly and much disappointed at not having encountered Mr. O'Donnell, and as soon as her uninvited guests had disappeared, Joan put her two elbows on the table and leaned her head upon her hands.

She was deeply disappointed at not having seen Larry, but she had not had time to feel the smart of it whilst the other girls were

with her. Now she took out his note, and read it over again. She supposed it was the truth—she trusted that Larry would never stoop to deceive her—and yet men were so untrustworthy, they thought nothing of a falsehood where a woman was concerned. It became policy with them then ; a kindness to allay her fears—a pardonable deceit in order that she might not worry herself over what was unavoidable. Only she could never believe that Larry would treat her so ; he knew she had too much sense to fret over trifles, and that she knew their several professions must occasionally interfere with their pleasant meetings.

Still, woman-like, she could not help wondering if it were really true that Amelia had seen him in company with a yellow-haired girl, and if so, who she was and where she came from. An actress, perhaps—Larry had so much to do with actors and actresses, they were always hanging about him, in hopes of getting a good notice. But he might have told her ; he must be pretty intimate with this one for her to have hung on his arm in the Strand, as her cousin had described her doing, and yet she (Joan) had never heard him mention any one girl in particular as being his friend. She wished he had been there ; she wished she could ask him what it meant. She was not in the least jealous ; he

might have the whole staff of a theater hanging on him, only she would like to know all about it, as well as Mealy ! And so, after having spent two or three hours in vain conjecture, Joan went to bed in very low spirits, and dreamed of Larry and the yellow-haired girl.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next meeting between the married couple proved to be a disastrous fiasco. Larry arrived at the flat next day, true to his time, but found the field occupied before him. Captain Hildyard, looking very long and lanky, and well pleased with himself, was stretched out in Joan's only armchair, whilst she was standing by the table, behind a stack of flowers which he had just brought up freshly plucked, from Windsor.

"I called here with some beauties for you yesterday, Miss Trevor," he had said on entering; "but, by Jove! you were out, so I gave them to my sister, and brought you these instead. They are fresh from the country, and that's their only merit!"

"Indeed, it is not!" replied Joan, burying her nose in the fragrance of roses, lilies, heliotrope, and geraniums. "They are lovely, and I thank you so much! Wherever shall I put the dear things? I am afraid I have not vases enough to hold them!"

"I wish I had known that; I would have brought you some vases too," laughed Captain

Hildyard ; and at that moment the door again opened, and Larry, looking very jaded and worn from his last night's orgie, joined them.

"Oh, Mr. O'Donnell," exclaimed Joan, trying to look all she could not say ; "is that you ? Come and admire my beautiful flowers ! Captain Hildyard has been kind enough to bring them all the way from Windsor for me. They are from his father's garden. Did you ever see such magnificent roses ? They scent the whole room. But how pale you are !" she said suddenly. "Have you a headache ?"

"A little," replied Larry, who was the color of a lemon. "We didn't get back from the Savoy till four this morning, and there was a lot of liquor about."

"Ah, the dress rehearsal of *The Mountaineers*, I suppose ?" drawled Captain Hildyard. "It must be a doose of a noosance for you writer fellows to have to dawdle about whilst the last drillings go on. I'd rather wait to see it when it's perfect."

"I dare say you would," retorted O'Donnell ; "but there are some things and people in this world that would keep us waiting a long time for that."

There was no love lost between these two men. They had barely greeted each other on meeting. Larry thought of Hildyard as a useless conceited popinjay, and the captain spoke of all pressmen and writers as "those

scribbling fellows, you know," and considered them much beneath himself. Added to which they were both admirers of Joan Trevor, and Larry as "the man in possession," had an unholy desire to kick Captain Hildyard out into the street, particularly on this occasion, when he himself had not seen Joan for forty-eight hours. But the captain was comfortably ensconced in the armchair, which was usually dedicated to Larry's ease, and seemed as if he had not the slightest intention of vacating it. Joan noted the dark looks of her husband, and the self-satisfied expression on the face of her visitor, and hastened to divert their attention from each other.

"I am sure you gentlemen would like a cup of tea," she said, "so I must leave my beautiful flowers for a little, while I get it for you. *You* drink tea, I believe?" she added interrogatively, to Captain Hildyard.

"By Jove! I should think you ought to know that," he answered. "It isn't the first time I've had tea with you, is it?"

"Oh no, of course not; but I have so many friends, you see, you must forgive me if I sometimes forget which of them like tea and which despise it."

"And have you no need, then, to put the same question to O'Donnell?" asked Hildyard, jealously.

"Oh no! Mr. O'Donnell and I are so

often compelled to meet on business, that I can remember his proclivities better ! " He enjoys a cup of good strong tea, particularly when he has a headache, as now ! " said Joan, with an affectionate glance in the direction of Larry.

" By Jove ! I wish I was in business as well as O'Donnell," said the captain, " that I might have a chance of transacting it with you all alone, as he seems to do, Miss Trevor ! "

" You want a clever head for that, Captain Hildyard ! " replied Joan, playfully.

" And a damned sight less cheek," growled Larry.

Hildyard was about to retort with something unpleasant, when Joan furtively touched his shoulder and made him think better of it. After all, though he was conceited and rather foolish, squabbling in the presence of a lady was not one of his weaknesses. But he twisted his chair round, so as to sit with his back to O'Donnell, whilst poor Joan wished heartily that one or the other of them would rise and go. But they had resolved to sit each other out, and sit they did accordingly.

The tea having been served and drank almost in silence, Joan returned to her flowers and attempted to make a diversion in their favor.

" What's this lovely blossom ? " she asked, holding it up to the captain. " I don't think I ever saw one like it before ! "

"Haven't you? That's a bee orchid! My mother has a house full of the various kinds of orchids!"

"It's just like a bee, isn't it?" she continued, holding the flower before Larry's face.

"Can't say I see the resemblance!" he muttered. "I hate hot-house flowers—nasty, scentless, forced things!"

"Oh, Larry, how cross you are!" cried Joan, forgetting herself.

"I'm not cross, I'm tired out! I hoped we should have had a few hours to get on with our work this evening; but I suppose it is not to be!"

"That means that my room will be preferable to my company!" said Captain Hildyard, rising.

"Oh, Captain Hildyard, pray don't say that!" exclaimed Joan, anxious not to offend either of them. "Mr. O'Donnell and I shall have ample time for our business later. Don't go yet."

"The time is getting on," replied Hildyard, consulting his watch. "By Jove! Half-past six! I had no idea it was so late. I dine out at seven. But I always forget time when I'm in your company, Miss Trevor! But before I go, I want to ask you if you will do me the honor to accept a box for *The Mountaineers* for Wednesday night? It will give me the greatest pleasure if you will permit me to

escort you there, and from what the papers say, I think you will be charmed with the piece."

Joan glanced towards Larry to see if she could read his wishes in his face ; but it was turned resolutely away. So she asked—

"Of whom will your party consist, Captain Hildyard ?"

"Well—haw—yourself, and—and—*me*, unless, indeed, you would like to ask a lady friend to go with us !"

"Oh yes, of course I must do that !" said Joan, irresolutely. "I couldn't go alone. I know several, of course, who would be very pleased to accept ; but——"

"Well, let it be this way !" interrupted the captain. "You bring any lady you may choose, Miss Trevor, and I'll bring one of my brother-officers to look after her. We shall be a nice little *parti carré*, and, perhaps, you and your friend will do us the honor to take a little supper at Simpson's, or somewhere afterwards, eh ?"

"Oh no, no !" said Joan, hurriedly. "I don't know about that ! You must promise to let us come back directly the play is over, please !"

Hildyard laughed in an uncertain manner.

"Ah, well, we'll leave that for future consideration, and I will have the pleasure of calling here for you and your friend at half-

past seven on Wednesday. Good evening ;" and he gathered up his hat and stick and walked out of the flat, without vouchsafing as much as a nod or bow to Larry O'Donnell.

As soon as he was gone, Joan crossed the room to where her husband sat, and leaning over his chair, imprinted a kiss upon his brow. But he pushed her away.

"Heyday, what's the matter now?" she asked, as she returned, rather offended, to her flowers.

"Matter enough, I should think," he growled, "when you've agreed to go to the theater with that cad, and have supper with him afterwards. A nice respectable sort of proceeding, I should think !"

"I did *not* promise to take supper with him afterwards, Larry. You heard me distinctly refuse. As to accompanying him to the theater, what harm is there in that ? What would you have had me do ? Captain Hildyard is uniformly kind to me. I can't accept his flowers and snub him in return !"

"Then don't take his beastly flowers. What right has he to offer them to you ? They're only a bribe—and the theater-box is another !"

"A bribe for—*what* ?" demanded Joan, proudly.

"God knows !"

"Don't you go too far with me, Larry, or

you may regret it. Why are you in such a beastly temper this afternoon? Here have I been living all day on the hope of seeing you, and now you make me wish that you had never come!"

"Perhaps, then, I had better go!" said Larry, as he made a feint of rising from his chair. But she ran and sat herself upon his knee.

"Now, you *can't* go, you old stupid," she said, "until I give you leave! Oh, Larry, don't make us both unhappy! What is this all about? What have I done wrong?"

"How can you ask me such a ridiculous question, when you know as well as I do, that I hate that long-legged brute Hildyard, and would never let him enter your presence if I could help it?"

"But you say that of every man I know, and you forget what we solemnly put our hands to—that we were not to interfere with each other's friends or pursuits. You would like to turn our marriage into one of the regular, hum-drum, uninteresting affairs that we both so much despise!"

"I don't like it as it is, anyway," replied Larry, in the same tone as before. "It's no marriage at all, in my eyes, when a fellow's wife goes racketing over town with any man who chooses to ask her, and sits alone with *him*, as I found you and Hildyard just now,

and accepts his presents and behaves in every respect as if she weren't married at all ! ”

“ But that's all nonsense,” she argued. “ We know that we *are* married, and that should be enough for us ! You wouldn't have me make a curtsey to Captain Hildyard, like a country milkmaid, and say, ‘ Thank you kindly, sir, but I am married privately to Mr. O'Donnell, and so you must excuse me, but I cannot accept a bunch of flowers from you or sit by your side in the theater ! ’ I understood that these were the very follies we had mutually agreed not to be guilty of. You appear to have forgotten all about our code of conditions, Larry ? ”

“ I've not forgotten it ; I wish I *could* forget the beastly thing ; but whether the world knows it or no, I won't have men like Hildyard hanging about you when I'm away, and I tell you that straight.”

“ What nonsense ! You would shut me up like a prisoner in this cell without any society, and without even the protection of your presence ! You would reduce my position to something worse than an ordinary marriage would have made it ! I never heard of anything so unreasonable and ridiculous ! ”

“ Well, then, if you don't like it, let us make our marriage public, and I will take my proper place beside you and keep all such dangles as Hildyard away ! ”

"Thank you—*bien oblige!*" cried Joan. "Indeed, if I didn't wish to be polite, I might say, thank you for nothing!" And with that she turned round upon him angrily. "*How* can we make our marriage public, when you know the mere fact would cause my name to be erased from grandfather's will? Was it not only on the express condition that it was to be kept a secret until after his death that I consented to marry you at all? If you break your word to me, Larry, and condescend to do so mean a thing, you will derive no benefit from it, for I should refuse to live with you ever afterwards."

"You cannot—you are my wife!" said Larry.

"I *can*, thank goodness, and I would, as sure as a gun! No man can compel a woman to live with him nowadays, so long as she is able to support herself! And I would rather starve or go to the workhouse than live with a man who could break his solemn word!"

"So I am fated, then, to see you flirting with any or every man who may happen to take your fancy?" said Larry, gloomily.

"If you like to put it so, my friend—yes; and so am I fated to see you, or hear of you, walking down the Strand with a yellow-haired lady clinging to your arm."

"What are you alluding to?" said her husband, starting.

"A yellow-haired girl! Don't I speak distinctly! I say I might just as well, or better, take umbrage at that, as you find fault with me for affecting the company of Captain Hildyard, who is no more to me than this table!"

"Who told you about a yellow-haired girl?" repeated Larry.

"It has hit the mark, my boy, hasn't it? Well, if you are very anxious to know the name of my informant, it was Miss Amelia James, who happened to be driving through the Strand with our revered aunt, and reported the tragic sight to me! Do you suppose *I* was going to make a fuss about it? No fear! If you hadn't been so foolish about Captain Hildyard, I should never have mentioned the matter! You might go down the Strand with the whole chorus of the Gaiety clinging to your coat-tails without affecting me in the very least! But please to accord me the liberty you take yourself!"

"But, Joan—about this girl with yellow hair. I really don't recollect being seen with any particular one. There are so many girls with yellow hair down that way!"

"You are quite right, my dear friend; and so are there many officers with long legs and no brains to speak of up this way! But if you walk with the one, why mayn't I go to the theater with the other?"

"But Joan—I love you so——"

"And so do I love you, you silly child!" said Joan, moving a little closer to him. "Whoever doubted it?"

"But it drives me wild to think that other fellows have the same privilege as I have."

"No other fellows have the same privilege as you have, Larry—" said Joan softly, with her lips upon his hair. He turned and caught her in his arms, and there was an end to sparring between them for that while.

"Oh, you silly boy!" cried the girl, after a long silence, as she sat upright and smoothed her ruffled hair, "how could you imagine for a moment that I could prefer that lanky booby to you? Why should I have married you under such disadvantageous circumstances if I had not felt something for you that was deeper and stronger than I had ever felt before? And this half-and-half life, Larry—spent in looking out for my husband who so often has to disappoint me and himself—it would be so dull if I might never go out with my friends, or change the atmosphere of this confined little flat!"

"Say no more, Joan; I am ashamed of myself and my petty jealousy! But I have such an awful headache! My head is ready to burst!"

Then Joan became all anxiety and wifely sympathy.

"Oh, darling, I am so sorry ! Let me get you something, Larry ! Would a bottle of champagne do it any good ? The porter will fetch one. Is the scent of these flowers too strong ? I'll chuck them all out of the window, if you like. Forget everything I've said, dear heart, if it annoyed you, and only remember that I would cut everybody in the world sooner than give you a moment's pain !"

It was a great concession for Joan to say as much as this, and Larry appreciated her unusual want of reticence.

"That girl with the yellow hair, Joan," he said presently ; "I have been thinking over it, and it must have been Nelly Wilton. She attacked me last week when I was on my way to the Gaiety bar, to get her an engagement in the chorus ; but I wasn't aware that she took my arm——"

"Oh, stop that nonsense, dear boy !" cried Joan. "Do you really think I care whether she did or not, so long as she didn't wrench it off ? There's not too much of my little man. I can't spare a square inch of him ! And now I'll just sit down and write Captain Hildyard that I've changed my mind about the theater, and then we'll have a long evening together !"

"No, no !" exclaimed Larry, "you shall do no such thing ; that would look as if I did not

trust you ! And I do trust you, Joan ; it's only my confounded jealousy that makes me so unreasonable. It seems so hard that whilst I can only see my darling by fits and starts, other men, who are nothing to you, should be able to enjoy your society for a whole evening !”

“So it is hard, Larrikins !” replied Joan ; “but it is only my *society* that the other men enjoy. My heart is with you all the while.”

“My own dear girl ! But I wanted to have taken you to *The Mountaineers* myself ; only there are such a deuce of a lot of things on this week, that I am afraid I shall not be able to spare an evening till next !”

“I shall wait till you can take me,” insisted Joan ; “I will not go with Captain Hildyard. I will write at once and tell him so, and you shall post the letter for me as you go home.”

Of course, Larry again objected, and, of course, Joan again insisted, and got her way into the bargain ; and then there ensued one of those love-scenes which sound so foolish in the telling, and are so sweet to those who engage in them. Larrikins was an adept in the art of making love, though he declared he knew nothing about it until Joan taught him ; but wherever he may have learned his lesson, it bore ample fruit.

There is a vast difference in the ways that men make love. Some seem, as it were, to

the manner born, whilst others, who feel as much, and perhaps more, have not the same capability of evincing their sentiments. Larry had it, however, to perfection, and his wife parted with him that evening more fascinated by his voice and manner and mode of expressing himself than she had ever been before. She went to bed quite happy, only wishing that the interview had not been so short, and that she had more opportunities of meeting this dearest friend in all the world to her.

A few days afterwards, she received a letter from Cecily Crosbie, saying they had returned to London, and begging her to go and see them as soon as possible. At first Joan told herself that she should not accept the invitation. True that, under a certain amount of pressure, she had attended Mrs. Crosbie's wedding, but they had never been intimate friends ; indeed, Joan was not the sort of girl to make many friends of her own sex. She classed them all with Amelia James and her contemporaries, and did not believe either in their prudence or their intellect.

She concluded that the newly-made wife was anxious to show off her marital happiness and the dignified position she had attained to the less fortunate companions of her maidenhood, and Joan told herself that she had no interest in either. Mrs. Crosbie dated her letter from Mrs. Ponsonby's house, where she

and her husband were staying, she said, whilst they looked out for one of their own. "My husband" indeed, figured so prominently in Cecily's letter that Mrs. Joan curled her lip more than once whilst perusing it, until she remembered that she too had a husband of her own, if she chose to trot him out for the edification of her acquaintances. The thought somewhat softened her feelings towards the bride. After all, she decided she would go and see her. Marriage might have done as much for Cecily as she felt it had for herself—made her know herself better than she had done before; see her faults in a clearer light, and generally wish that she were a better woman. It was true that Cecily Ponsonby had chosen her life's companion with far less deliberation or knowledge of his character than she had chosen Larry. True also that Captain Crosbie was, in Joan's opinion, an empty-headed booby, who had chosen his wife for her pretty face, and not for her intelligence; still Joan felt a vague curiosity to ascertain how they got on together, and if married happiness were to be obtained on a lower level than her own. Cecily had named an afternoon for meeting, and on the day appointed, as soon as Joan could get away from Lord Mauleverer, she took her way to Bayswater. It was past five o'clock, and she had to apologize for the lateness of her appearance; but Mrs. Crosbie,

though her tongue had run incessantly the whole afternoon, was delighted to see her. Her other guests had departed, and the weak, cold tea, and remains of macaroons and chocolate creams with which she had regaled them did not look very inviting ; but Joan, in order to pacify her "hospitable cares," was compelled to take some. But she could hardly eat for looking at Cecily, and wondering at the change that had taken place in her. Miss Ponsonby had been a rather pretty, but pale and somewhat peevish-looking girl ; but Mrs. Crosbie was round and rosy and smiling, as if she had never known a care in the wide world.

"How well you are looking !" exclaimed Joan, as they met. "Why, I should hardly have known you again. Italy has worked miracles for you, Cecily. I have never seen you look so rosy before !"

"Oh, it isn't Italy," replied the bride, as she kissed unwilling Joan over and over again ; "it's my Charlie, Miss Trevor. He's been so good to me, that my honeymoon has been a species of Paradise. I've been telling all the girls this afternoon to get married as soon as ever they can. They won't know what life is until they do !"

"But they might not get another Captain Crosbie," said Joan, laughing.

"No," replied Cecily, pursing her lips ; "I suppose not ; for I don't believe there can be

two men like him in the world. But still they can get good men to love them ; and what I mean is that they must not let a chance go by."

"I dare say you are right," said Joan, musingly, "and that mutual love is the best thing we can attain."

"Oh, it isn't only the love, dear !" replied Mrs. Crosbie, who seemed to have grown marvellously wise since they had parted. "Many people love, you know, and are very miserable in consequence ; it's the beautiful security and freedom in marriage that makes it so happy. To feel that you actually *belong* to your husband—that you have a right to appeal to him for advice or assistance or protection whenever you require it ; that all the world may know you love each other and you may glory in the fact—I think that is the grand thing that brings so much peace and pleasure with it !"

"But cannot one love in secret and feel just as happy?" questioned Joan. "Isn't there something more sacred in a private love that is not shared by the world?"

Mrs. Crosbie thought a moment and then shook her head.

"Oh no ! Joan, think of the anxiety and suspense and disappointments it would bring in its train. Women want their love for a man to be an assured thing, so that other

women may not poach on their preserves. My husband says the publicity of it is its security. One feels so proud to think that the man one loves has chosen one from the whole world, that one wants the whole world to know it too. It would be terrible, I think, to feel your husband was your very own, but to be afraid to confess it, to have to sit by, as it were and keep your mouth shut while people discussed his faults before you, and you were unable to stand up for him or tell them what he really was. My husband says——”

“ You have got those two words very pat, at all events, Cecily,” remarked Joan, smiling.

“ Oh, because they are the only two words worth saying, in my opinion,” interposed the bride, eagerly. “ I wonder now how I ever could have lived without my Charlie to look after me.”

“ Well, my dear Cecily, I am very glad to hear you are so happy, and that your marriage has turned out a success, for it is a bit of a lottery, you know.”

“ So people used to tell me beforehand, but I have drawn a prize. . You don't know how Charlie looks after me, and takes care of me, lest I should get too tired, or take a cold. He is always ready, dear fellow, to save me fatigue and trouble of every sort. And then to know that we are to be together for the rest of our lives, that if either of us is sick or sorry, the

other will be close at hand to nurse or comfort, it gives such a blessed feeling of peace and security, you cannot think."

"I dare say," replied Joan, as her thoughts wandered after Larry, going into all sorts of horrid places, night after night, risking infection, and liable at any time to fall ill in his bachelor lodgings without any one near him.

"My husband is going to sell out," continued Mrs. Crosbie ; "indeed, he has already sent in his papers."

"Will you like that ?" asked Joan.

"To have him always at home ? Oh, the idea is heavenly !" cried Cecily. "You see, whilst he remains in the army, he is always liable to be ordered on foreign service or to those horrid maneuvers, or to be moved to another barracks, and that might break up our home at any time. But when he has sold out, he will set about getting some other work, and we shall never be separated again, thank Heaven."

"There is such a thing as seeing *too* much of each other, remember," said Joan, laughing.

At that moment Captain Crosbie entered the room.

"Oh, Charlie," cried his wife, "here is Miss Trevor, who was at our wedding, you know, and she is saying such dreadful things ! She thinks if you sell out of the army, that we shall see too much of one another !"

"It is quite possible!" said Captain Crosbie, smiling, as he shook hands with Joan.

"You horrid thing! You don't mean what you say!" exclaimed Cecily, pretending to pout. "You've often told me that you never could get tired of——"

"No tales out of school," interrupted her husband, putting his hand before her mouth. His wife caught and kissed it before he could draw it away. Captain Crosbie did not resent the action, but, stooping, just touched the fair fluffy hair that crowned her head, with his lips.

"Here's a silly little girl, Miss Trevor!" he remarked from the height of his superior wisdom.

"At all events she seems a very happy one!" replied Joan, as she rose to go.

As she walked homewards, her mind was filled with what she had seen and heard. Cecily Ponsonby, whom she had always regarded as a very inferior sort of a girl, at all events mentally, and who had certainly entered upon marriage with very little consideration, seemed suddenly to have acquired an amount of confidence in herself and her possessions which was surprising to her! Whether she loved her husband in the best way or not, marriage had endued the commonplace somewhat ignorant girl with a dignity and an assurance which quite transformed her. Joan's lip curled a little as she recalled the openly bestowed

caress which Cecily had given her husband ; but her contempt was mingled with a slight degree of envy, as she thought how distant *she* was compelled to appear towards Larry whenever a third party was by. How the hot color rose to her face if, by mistake, she called him by his Christian name, and how constrained and cold she was obliged to profess to be. It hurt her to have to address him as Mr. O'Donnell ; but there was no help for it, and so long as her grandfather lived, there could be no change. She had often sneered at the folly of people in love, at their melting looks, their sighs, their tender intonation ; but in her heart of hearts, Joan would have given a good deal to be free to do as she felt inclined in the matter. She was engaged to accompany Larry to the theater that very evening. She had agreed to meet him somewhere outside the building with a thick veil over her face, and to creep in as quietly as she could when no one in particular was looking her way. Why couldn't she drive up boldly in a hansom with her husband, as Mrs. Crosbie would have done, and have him to hand her out and in, and to be proud to present him to any acquaintance whom she might meet ? She knew why, well enough. It was her own fiat that it should be so ; that horrid seven thousand pounds a year stood in the way, to spoil all her pleasure as a wife. Once or twice

the thought flashed through her mind, " Could she give it up? Could she, for the sake of living a free, untrammelled married life, relinquish the prospect of independence at General Steele's death?" and she shuddered and said, No. She would grow tired of domesticity after a while, she was sure of it, everybody did; and in that case if there were nothing to fall back upon, no resources to keep poverty from the door, love would fly out at the window! It was better to let matters be. If she dared not kiss Larry in public, there were numberless sweet moments when they were alone, and she could have her fill of kisses, and perhaps all the sweeter ones, because they were stolen. And so Joan put the ugly shadow away from her path, and prepared to enjoy the evening before her, even though the audience could not be made aware that the man who accompanied her was her husband and she loved him best of all the world.

CHAPTER VII.

THE season was far advanced ; it was nearing the middle of July, and people were beginning to consider where they should spend their holidays, when Joan received a most astonishing letter from her cousin Mealy. Larry had been exceedingly busy about that time ; there had been a Naval Review at Portsmouth, and he had been staying down there for a week, and the husband and wife had had but one hurried interview since his return, during which he had told her that he should not be in Chelsea again for a couple of days. And then arrived the remarkable letter which made Joan think the world must be coming to an end. "Only fancy," wrote Amelia, "the strangest thing in the world has happened. Yesterday aunt and I went for a stroll in the park with that beast, Flo, who refused to follow us at one moment and ran frantically under people's legs the next. We had crossed from Hyde Park Corner on our way home, when the brute suddenly took it into her head to rush back amongst all the carriages and the mud, for the road had just been watered.

Aunt Eliza gave a shriek and nearly fainted and I thought (with gratitude) that the fat old monster's days were numbered, when a gentleman perceiving our distress, ran after Flo, and collared her from under the very wheels of a hansom. He brought her to us in his arms—his coat plastered with the mud off her paws, when, to my amazement, I found that it was Mr. O'Donnell. Aunt, who was filled with gratitude, recognized him also. 'How can I ever thank you sufficiently,' she exclaimed, 'for rescuing my poor thoughtless favorite from so horrible a death?' 'Only too happy to have been of any service to you,' said Mr. O'Donnell, politely; and then, seeing that aunt was actually thinking of taking the muddy old beast in her arms, he continued, 'You must allow me to carry her home for you, for I am sure she is too heavy for a lady!' Aunt simpered and bridled at him as if she had been eighteen (and between you and me and the post, Joan, I believe, for all her averred hatred of the nobler sex, she wouldn't half mind having a young man of her own, provided she could get one), and Mr. O'Donnell walked back with us, and deposited Flo on the doormat. He took off his hat then, and was about to depart, when aunt insisted upon his coming in and being introduced to grand-papa, who, to my utter astonishment, instead of dismissing him with a grunt, which is his

usual amiable fashion of receiving a stranger, entered into a lively conversation—thanked him cordially for his assistance; found Mr. O'Donnell had been war correspondent in South Africa, and ended by inviting him to dine with us this evening and have a talk over old times. Will wonders ever cease? So I am trimming up my black dinner-dress for Mr. O'Donnell's especial benefit, and am looking forward to to-night with feelings of unqualified satisfaction. If I can make the running with him, I shall; and I know you won't mind, as you don't seem to like the poor little man half well enough. I look upon his coming here as a perfect miracle—or is it Fate, and are my first intuitions regarding him right? I felt an enormous interest in him from the moment we met—I have mentioned his name to you more than once, haven't I?—so perhaps there is something in clairvoyance, after all, and he and I are destined to come together. It *is* strange— isn't it?—that he should be about the only man that I can ever remember grandpapa taking a fancy to at first sight. It's all on account of his having been a war correspondent, I suppose; but still it is remarkable. So I am anticipating this evening no end, and hope it may not be the last time that Mr. O'Donnell will dine with us!”

Joan perused this epistle with mixed feelings. She was not sorry that General Steele had met

Larry and taken a fancy to him ; but she was not going to have Mealy making eyes at him—Larry located as a visitor in Queen's Gate, and her cousin regarding him as her lawful prey. It was very funny when she came to think of it. At the same time she was her husband's lawful protector—so she told herself—and she was not going to let him be subjected to the temptation of Amelia's watery blue eyes and simpering smiles, without being there to guard him from danger.

And Larry had not informed her of the invitation or his acceptance, which formed an extra reason why she should be present to look after him. So, as soon as the dinner hour was past, Mrs. O'Donnell put on her hat, and prepared to pay an informal evening visit at her grandfather's house. She came upon the family sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, drinking coffee—Amelia, in a dress much bedizened with artificial flowers, was reclining on a couch in a sultanesque attitude, and making big eyes at the guest whenever his face was turned her way, whilst Larry was seated between the general and Miss Steele, with the wheezy asthmatic spaniel, Flo—oh, artful Larry !—on his lap. As Joan made her appearance Mealy grew very red and darted a guilty glance in her direction.

“Why, who would have thought of seeing you, Joan ?” she exclaimed.

Larry lifted his brows as if the *rencontre* were a great surprise to him; but Joan took faint notice of either of them.

"Well, grandfather," she said, going up to the old man, "are you the better for your week in Warwickshire? Aunt Eliza, I think I have heard of a dog that will suit you. Why, Mr. O'Donnell, is that really you? I never knew you were acquainted with my grandfather! Good evening, Mealy! What on earth do you mean by wearing artificial flowers at a family dinner? What a warm day it has been!" and she threw her hat and mantle on an adjacent chair.

"I consider it chilly," replied the old man; "but you must content yourself with the company of your aunt and cousin this evening, Joan, for I am going to carry Mr. O'Donnell off to the library, as soon as he has had his coffee. He was war correspondent, I find, during the Matabele war, and is going to be good enough to point out the exact positions taken by our troops during it. I always said there was some mismanagement there; had I been in command I would not have sacrificed a single man; but, as it was——"

"I think Miss Trevor knows almost as much about the war as I do," said Larry, anxious to include Joan in the library conclave; "she has studied the matter deeply for the benefit of Lord Mauleverer."

"Pooh!" replied the general, "what can a mere woman know of war tactics? She can copy out what we men say about them, and that's all. There is a lot of foolish talk nowadays about females using their brains and going into business, etc.; but what *I* say is, give them the brains first and then let them try to use them."

"My grandfather, you will perceive, Mr. O'Donnell," said Joan, "is not an advocate for women's rights. It would be a difficult matter for a woman to circumvent you, or take you in, wouldn't it, grandfather?"

"I should rather think so," replied the general, in his squeaky little voice. "I should like to find the female who could! I'd give—I'd give a couple of thousand pounds to any man who could prove what I say to be untrue."

"Mr. O'Donnell, why don't you go in for the prize?" said Joan. "You wouldn't mind having a couple of thousand pounds, would you?"

"By jingo, no!" replied Larry, laughing.

"Well, I'm not prepared to say that it is not in my power to put Mr. O'Donnell in the way of making that sum, or a bigger one, perhaps, if he chooses to follow my advice," said General Steele, chuckling. "The present war affords great opportunities for a young man to distinguish himself even as a corre-

spondent, and to get some loot into the bargain."

"Oh, I hope you are not going to advise Mr. O'Donnell to go out to the Soudan!" interposed Joan, unthinkingly.

"And, pray, what business would it be of yours, miss, if I did?" asked her grandfather, elevating his bushy eyebrows.

"None at all, of course, only he is one of our best press writers, and there are plenty of correspondents out there already."

"Nonsense, nonsense, what should a girl like you know about such matters?" said the old man, testily. "Mr. O'Donnell, if you will come to the library with me, I will show you my map of South Africa, and you can point out the exact positions to me where our troops were posted. I used to try and follow them during the war; but the newspaper reports are so uncertain that I was never sure if I were right."

"Certainly, general," replied Larry, rising. "I shall have great pleasure in doing so."

"Well, you had better say good night to the ladies," continued the general, "for they will be going to bed before we have finished."

"Indeed! then perhaps it will be advisable," said Larry, as he shook hands with Miss Steele and her nieces. As he approached his wife, he was just able to form with his lips the words, "See you to-night," before his host

whisked him out of the room, and left the women to themselves.

"How annoying of grandpapa, selfish old beast!" said Mealy, under her breath. "He monopolized the conversation all dinner-time, and now he won't let us say a word to Mr. O'Donnell during the evening?"

She was half disposed to weep as she sat behind her aunt, and made faces at the spot where her grandfather had last stood.

"A most agreeable young man," remarked Miss Steele, "and apparently good-hearted. He has taken quite a fancy to my dear Flo. It is a pity one cannot change his sex."

"Humph!" said Joan, "I prefer him as he is."

"My dear, pray think of what you are saying. What possible difference could it make to you? Were Mr. O'Donnell a lady, you would be able to enjoy a much more familiar intercourse with him."

"Perhaps so, Aunt Eliza; but I like men better than women, as I have often told you."

"A very sad proclivity, my dear. If you could hear my new maid Harriet speak of the other sex, you would realize, perhaps, how pure and good a woman's life may be without them. Amelia, my dear, what are you sniffing like that for? Have you contracted a cold?"

"No," replied Miss James, defiantly; "but

I do think it is mean of grandpapa, when we don't have a gentleman to dinner once in a blue moon, to whip Mr. O'Donnell off in that manner, before we have had time to exchange two words with him."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Miss Steele, veering round in her chair so as to be able to examine her niece's countenance; "I do hope, Amelia, that you are not going to imbibe your cousin Joan's unladylike sentiments regarding gentlemen, and which, as you know, have been the unhappy cause of many a difference between us."

"Now, Aunt Eliza, please to leave me out of the question," cried Joan; "we have agreed to differ, long ago. And make some allowance for poor Mealy's youth. I dare say you liked the men well enough, when you were her age?"

Miss Steele did not like to acknowledge that the real truth of the matter was the men had not liked her, so she pursed up her mouth as she answered—

"Well, my dear, that is as it may be; but I have been taught the folly of it long ago. A virginal life passed in the performance of our duty, is the only one that brings satisfaction and the consciousness of well-doing."

"But it was your choice, Aunt Eliza," replied Joan; "you will never persuade me that you would not have been married fifty times over

if the men had had their own way" (at which assertion Miss Steele was seen to smile grimly), "so don't you think that Mealy and I should have the same privilege? How ever are we to discern good from evil if we never have the chance of comparing one with the other?"

"It is a chance fraught with danger, my dear. Every woman is not so mercifully guarded as I was, and may fall into a trap from which death only can deliver them."

"I'd rather have death than go without the chance," sniffed Amelia.

"Well, Mealy, it's no use your sniffing after Mr. O'Donnell," said her cousin, "for as I have told you before, he is not a marrying man."

"A marrying man indeed!" exclaimed Aunt Eliza, thoroughly roused; "and if he were, what then? You know your grandfather's decision, my dears—that if either of you girls marry, your name will be erased from his will. He is quite firm on that matter, so the sooner you put marriage out of your heads the better."

"Whoever said it was in mine," quoth Mrs. O'Donnell, as she put on her hat. "I am too fond of money to be such a fool as to run the risk of losing it. Grandfather will wait a long time before he hears of *my* marriage! What man on earth would be worth seven thousand pounds a year?"

"That is the proper light in which to view it," said Miss Steele, approvingly.

"But it is awful to contemplate passing the whole of one's life as a horrid, dried-up old maid!" remarked Miss James, totally ignoring her aunt's position and presence.

"Amelia!" exclaimed Miss Steele, in a tone of severe reproof. "I am astonished at you! If the state of virginity is so distasteful to you, you had better look out for a husband at once! But let me assure you that it is possible to remain pure and undefiled, without becoming, as you most vulgarly term it, 'dried-up.'"

"Mealy, hold your tongue, and don't make a fool of yourself!" said Joan, sharply; and then to Miss Steele, "Aunt Eliza, you mustn't think twice of what she said. Mealy is disappointed just now, and expressed herself without thought or consideration; but in her heart, she thinks as I do on this subject, and I am sure would be the last person in the world to wish to be a better or more distinguished person than yourself!"

"You always had the more sense of the two, Joan," replied the old lady; "but Amelia will have either to give up the idea of marriage or all her claim to her grandfather's property, for my dear brother, with characteristic forethought for you both, has left me, in case of his death, to carry out his wishes in this particular" ("Merciful heavens!" thought Mrs.

O'Donnell to herself), "and I shall, of course, be most strict in enforcing them."

"I am sure he could not have chosen any one better calculated to do so!" replied Joan, with meek deceit; then, bidding her aunt and cousin good night, she hurried home to make everything ready for Larry.

As soon as he entered her flat, she flew into his arms, and after well kissing him, commenced to well abuse him for not having sent her an intimation that he was to dine in Queen's Gate.

"Fancy, if that simpleton Mealy had not gushed to me on the subject," she said, "I might have walked into the house, 'promiscuous,' and had a fit on seeing you there! I could not have conceived anything more unlikely to happen. Larry, is it a good or bad omen that the old man should have cottoned to you so suddenly?"

"Good, of course, you silly girl! He has offered to do all sorts of kind things for me, even to introducing me to the Commander-in-Chief, or some equally exalted chum of his, in order to accompany some general to the seat of war as private correspondent!"

"But, Larry—Larry, you would never go?" cried Joan, in alarm.

"Why not, dear, if it is to make money for us both?"

"*Why not?* Do you want to kill me. Do

you consider what *I* should suffer left behind, to fancy each mail would bring me the news of your disablement or death? Oh, Larry, promise me you will not go! I couldn't bear it!"

"Silly little woman! I didn't think you cared so much for me as all that. Well, I'm not going yet, nor likely to do so, so don't worry over what may never happen. But it *is* funny— isn't it?—that the general should take a fancy for promoting my interests. The old gentleman is wonderfully interested in the Soudan. He told me it was the only occurrence that had made him regret that he had retired from the army. He snorted like an old war-horse scenting the battle as I showed him the positions our army took up during the Matabele war, and he declared that they were all wrong, and that had *he* been in command, there should not have been half the loss. He is a fine old man, after all, this grandfather of yours, Joan!"

"I dare say; but much too fine for me! I wish he had confined himself to drilling his regiment and ordering about his officers and left his granddaughters alone. Aunt Eliza was giving us another jobation after you left to-night on the iniquity of marriage and the unalterable decision of her brother that Mealy and I are to die old maids! A nice old maid *I* shall make, eh, Larry?"

"You would be delightful under any circumstances, my darling!" cried Larry, rapturously. "But it must be our united aim to make your grandfather think better of that will. Who knows if *I* may not be the ultimate means of persuading him to reverse it!"

"I am sure you ought, considering it's all through you that I've lost my chance of inheritance. But, Larrikins, why didn't you write me word of this wonderful invitation?"

"Because I wanted to astonish you! I wanted to see how you would look when I walked in here and said, 'I've just come from dining with your respected grandfather, and he sends his love to you!' I should have liked to see the big eyes you would have made—to say nothing of hearing the abuse you would have lavished upon me for being a liar. Really, Joan, I think this lucky accident may lead to some good for you and me—at all events, it cannot make things worse. General Steele has asked me down to Belstone Castle!"

"And not *me*!" cried Joan.

"Cannot you go there whenever you like?"

"Not entirely, although I have no doubt a little fishing would procure me an invitation. You see, I have not been in *bon odeur* with grandfather since electing to have my own way, and he would hardly choose the time when he had a gentleman visiting at the Castle to extend his courtesy to me. Men are the

chief things to be kept out of Mealy's way and mine. We are a species of cannibal in grandfather's estimation, and supposed to swallow one of the other sex as soon as we set eyes on him !”

“ Well, you've swallowed me effectually, you jade ! I can neither eat, drink, nor sleep when I am away from you. So, if you will give me a brandy and soda, I think I should feel all the better for it !”

As she handed him the glass, he said--

“ Where are we to go this summer for our holidays ?”

“ I don't believe I shall be able to go anywhere. I have hardly a penny left ! This has been such an expensive season.”

“ But that need make no difference, my dear ! I have plenty of 'oof,' or I can borrow it, which comes to the same thing !”

“ You won't borrow it for me, Larry ! I prefer to pay my own way !”

“ Nonsense, when you're my wife ! It's my right to pay for you !”

“ Not in a rational marriage such as ours. We have agreed, remember, not to come upon each other for money, and I am not going to break my pledged word !”

“ But since I offer it to you, it is not coming upon me.”

“ All the same, I am not going to let you pay for me. If I did, I should feel that I was

not giving you your *quid pro quo*. Women who are kept and fed and clothed are bound to make a comfortable home for their husbands in return—and I don't."

"Oh yes, you do, darling, to the utmost of your ability ; and if I am satisfied, no one has a right to find fault with you."

"That's all very well ; but the fact remains. Also, that I have stipulated to retain my liberty and freedom of action in all things—which are two more articles that the ladies who sit down in an armchair and open their mouths to be fed are compelled to relinquish."

"You shall retain all you want—and take everything into the bargain—if you will only come away with me this summer and let me give you a high old time."

"No, thank you, Larry. You won't get it out of me by coaxing. But if I see my way to share expenses, I promise you I will go wherever you may wish to take me."

"That's a bargain, then. Give me a kiss on the strength of it," replied Larry, who was too sleepy to talk much longer, and presently went home.

Shortly after this conversation, Joan met him with sparkling eyes and a countenance brimful of intelligence.

"Why, what's up, now?" cried Larry.

"Oh, Larry dear, such a stroke of good luck ! We shall have our summer holiday together

after all. I'm not sure that the 'ready' won't run to the height of my ambition—a voyage to Japan ! ”

“ My faith ! Has your grandfather forestalled his legacy to you ? ”

“ Not he ! But Lord Mauleverer has made me an offer which is almost as good. He has got some work or other to do for the Government, and has decided to start for Egypt almost immediately, and is going to take me as his private secretary.”

“ By Jove, he will do no such thing ! Take you as his private secretary ! Curse his impudence ! I'd like to see him try it ! ” exclaimed her husband.

“ Larry, what do you mean ? ”

“ Just what I say. Lord Mauleverer may look out for some one else to be his secretary. He doesn't take my wife out of England with him ! ”

“ But I've accepted the engagement ! ”

“ Then you must cancel it. I forbid the banns. Going to Egypt with a bachelor ! I never heard of such a thing ! It's monstrous ! You don't go ! ”

At that Joan lost her temper.

“ Many thanks for your interference,” she said sarcastically ; “ but it is not required, and you will please to let me manage my affairs my own way. The engagement has been offered me and I have accepted it, and have

no intention of rescinding my decision. Lord Mauleverer will pay all my first-class expenses there and back, and I shall live in the hotel with him, besides having fifty pounds over and above my usual salary. It is a very generous offer, and I mean to close with it—indeed, I may say I have done so.”

Larry left his chair and commenced striding up and down the room.

“You shall not go !” He said angrily.

“I *shall* go !” replied Joan, firmly.

“What—when I forbid it ?”

“You have no right to forbid it. By the term of our agreement——”

“Damn the agreement !” exclaimed O’Donnell.

“Damning it does not do away with it,” said his wife ; “we gave each other our sacred word of honor to abide by its clauses. If we have no honor, perhaps we may break our own word ; but it does not follow that we can force our partner to break his. With your own consent, you left me free to do in all things as I might see fit, and I see fit to go to Egypt in the capacity of Lord Mauleverer’s secretary.”

“But to travel such a distance under the protection of a bachelor ! It is unheard of. What will the world say ? What base motives may it not impute to such a proceeding ?”

“It may say and impute what it likes. I

dare say it has already imputed several nasty things to you and me ; but I do not give you up in consequence. Be reasonable, Larry, or try to be so. I want this fifty pounds to go holiday-making with you, and I mean to have it ! ”

“ You will never go holiday-making with me upon it ! ” cried O'Donnell, fiercely ; “ I would scorn to touch a penny of it. I am not sure that it will not be the cause of an open rupture between us. Do you expect me to receive you back with rejoicing after a month spent with Lord Mauleverer ! No ; if you are resolved to go, stay with him altogether. I won't have you back again, and I tell you that straight ! ”

“ All right ; I dare say it won't be so difficult to find a substitute. You are not such a very great catch, after all, you know, Larry ; and the bliss of entertaining you at tea every other afternoon, and losing a whole evening which might have been profitably spent elsewhere, when you can't come, is not so stupendous that it cannot be relinquished without cutting one's throat ! ”

“ You are determined, then, to fly in my face in this matter, Joan ? ”

“ I am determined to do what I consider right and politic in my own interests, if you call that flying in your face, ” replied the girl. “ I see that my position will be advanced by

going to Egypt with Lord Mauleverer, and so I am going without asking leave of any one !”

“I shall inform General Steele of your intention, and beg him to use his influence to prevent your ruining your reputation in this scandalous manner !”

Joan elevated her dark eyebrows.

“Indeed ; and what reason will you give him for your uncalled-for interference in my affairs. What do you suppose you will get for your pains from a man whose one idea is to keep thoughts of men and marriage out of his granddaughters’ minds ? He will tell you to go to the devil !”

“I am there already,” said Larry, “and it is you who have driven me. I did not believe it of you, Joan. I thought——”

“Now, Larry,” interposed his wife, “just listen to me for a moment. All this squabbling and recrimination will not further your cause in the slightest degree. You are only making me recall my old horror of the holy state, and thank my lucky stars that I bound you down as a gentleman to sign that agreement. You told me at the time that it was not worth the paper it was written on, and I asked you in return if I were about to marry a gentleman or not. You replied I was, and I hold you to your word. If you break it by attempting to restrain me in this matter, or by making our marriage public and thus losing me my inher-

itance, I will never live with you again—I will never even *see* you again, if I can help it—so now you can take your choice !”

“Perhaps it will be the other way,” muttered Larry, “and *I* shall refuse to have anything to do with you in the future.”

“In that case, we shall only find ourselves in the same positions that we were before, and not much the worse, I dare say, for our brief acquaintanceship. It is the usual end of marriage, you know ; I warned you of that before we were foolish enough to imagine that *we* could escape what all the world has to endure—the indifference that follows a close companionship.”

“And you can part with me like that !” said her husband, reproachfully.

“Better so, surely, than with acrimony and abuse. I always thought that the system wouldn’t work, and you see that, even with the palliatives we put upon it, it is a failure. The old Adam will come in ; the old notion that the man is entitled by nature to trample upon the woman and bend her to his will. I hoped we had found a cure for this sort of thing, but it seems I was mistaken. So, really, I think your suggestion that we should part is not an unwise one.”

“It was not *my* suggestion—it was yours,” replied Larry, hotly.

“Pardon me, then ; I made a mistake,”

rejoined Joan, calmly ; " but it comes to the same thing in the end. I must either bend my will and sense of propriety to your command, or lose the pleasure of your society. Well, then, I refuse to bend my will."

"Then, you've seen the last of me," said O'Donnell, reaching for his hat.

"That must be according to your own decision," replied his wife.

She had been standing on the opposite side of the table whilst this discussion was going on, and, as the young man rushed impetuously from the room, he did not even turn to look into her face. He went so suddenly that she had hardly time to realize that he was going before he had disappeared. But she confidently expected that he would return. Larry would never leave her like that, without even a farewell. He was rather peppery at times ; Joan had had evidence of the fact before, but he could not possibly have meant what he said. In a few minutes, when he had cooled down again, he would surely come back and tell her how sorry he was to have spoken so hastily and unbecomingly. The color came and went in her face as she heard the sound of his receding feet, and she drummed her fingers nervously on the table before her as she listened anxiously to hear them coming upstairs again. But Joan waited in vain. Larry did not come back. She flew to her win-

dow, which commanded a view of the street, and watched his figure striding as fast as he could in the direction of the railway station. He was really cross with her, then, her little man, who was so seldom put out for more than a minute or two, and so ready, as a rule, to confess himself in the wrong and plead for a kiss of forgiveness. But she wouldn't worry herself, Joan decided. It was impossible that he would sleep upon their estrangement; he would return later on, and tell her she was in the right, and might do just as she liked with regard to Lord Mauleverer and everything else. It was only five o'clock; she would type-write for a couple of hours, and Larry would be in time for supper. She went out before she settled down to work, and bought a lobster and crisp lettuce, such as Larry loved, and laid them in a cool place for his supper. And then she tried to forget the unpleasant occurrence in hard work. She was copying a law brief for a firm of solicitors, and the difficult and engrossing nature of her work diverted her attention from her trouble whilst it lasted; but when she found that nine o'clock had struck and Larry had not come back to eat that lobster, Joan felt too weary and despondent for anything. What had she said? What had she done to make him so angry with her? Had she really outraged the *bien-séances de la société* by consenting to accom-

pany Lord Mauleverer to Egypt? Had her husband a just and lawful cause for complaint because of her decision? Was it love on his part that feared so greatly for her safety and her reputation, or was it merely desire to show his authority over her and display his marital power? Larry had never attempted to thwart her in any of her projects before—why should he have been so cantankerous on this occasion? Surely—surely he could never be so foolish as to be jealous of Lord Mauleverer, an old man of sixty, who wore a wig, and was as lame as he could be. But men were so silly; there was no saying what they would do next. Anyway, there was no doubt that Larry was really offended this time, or surely he would have returned to make it up with her before she went to bed.

She brought out the lobster and salad, and dressed them as carefully as if Larry were sure to partake of them; but when she finally determined that it was useless to wait any longer, and she had better have her supper by herself, the comestibles seemed to have lost their flavor, and, instead of enjoying them, as she had fully intended to do, Joan laid her head down upon the table, and burst into a prolonged fit of tears.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD MAULEVERER was congratulating himself on the fact that Miss Trevor had consented to accompany him to Egypt. He had hardly hoped, when he made the proposition, that she would have accepted it. Many girls would have blushed and simpered and said they were not sure, and it was rather an unusual thing, and they must learn what their parents said about it, before they could venture on an answer. But Joan had first looked surprised, then pleased ; and finally had unequivocally accepted both the engagement and the terms. And his lordship hardly knew how he should have done without her services. He could have engaged another secretary, of course ; but Joan suited him, and he had grown used to her. He had become slightly deaf with increasing years, but he could always hear her clear, incisive voice ; he was a little forgetful also of dates and quotations which her fresh memory could always supply for him ; and though he was too proud to acknowledge it, he was perfectly aware how much his speeches and writings owed to her amend-

ments and corrections. To have her with him in Egypt, therefore, was to be assured of the success of his expedition, and it was with consternation that he heard her say the following morning, that she had changed her mind.

She had arrived in Clanricarde Gardens, looking much less bright and smart than usual. Her clothes appeared to have been hastily assumed ; her tailor-made coat lacked its button-hole, and her eyelids were red and swollen from weeping.

"I am sorry to tell you, Lord Mauleverer," she said as they met, "that I must rescind my decision of yesterday. I find there is some difficulty about my accompanying you to Egypt, and therefore, though I am dreadfully disappointed over the matter, I must ask you to find some one to take my place !"

The old lord was visibly put out.

"Difficulty ! What difficulty ?" he repeated. "You accepted my offer definitely and unconditionally, Miss Trevor !"

"I know I did, and that makes me all the more sorry to have to draw back now. A trip to Egypt would have been as pleasurable as profitable to me. But my friends won't hear of it, unfortunately."

"Is it your grandfather who objects to it ?"

"No, oh no !" faltered Joan. "I have not mentioned it to my grandfather yet !"

"But he is your guardian, isn't he?"

"My natural guardian, yes!"

"Then who else has any right to object to what you do! Now, look here, Miss Trevor. When you came here as my secretary, you never asked leave of anybody, and ever since you have been with me (two years, isn't it?), you have acted in all things on your own responsibility, and you have boasted of doing so. In the same manner you accepted my offer to go to Egypt, and I must hold you to it. I can't do without you!"

"But——" commenced the girl.

"I won't listen to any 'buts.' A bargain is a bargain, you know; and you said plainly, 'Yes,' so there's an end to it. If you want a larger bonus, you shall have it—I remembered after we parted that you might require a lot of frilleries and furbelows for a hot climate which would run you into expense—so let us say one hundred pounds instead of fifty, and consider the matter settled, unless you would like to have a letter from me confirming it. I find I must start by the mail of Saturday after next, which gives us only ten days, so you must look sharp about your preparations!"

"But, indeed, Lord Mauleverer," replied Joan, in a voice which seemed somehow on the verge of tears; "you must let me speak plainly to you. I feel your generosity, and

the trust you place in me very much indeed—more than I can say ; but it is impossible that I can go with you—it is indeed ! ”

“ But why—why ? Give me your reasons ! ” said his lordship, impatiently.

“ My friends will not hear of it. They have quarreled with me already on the subject. If I accompany you, in spite of all they have said, it will be the means of a permanent rupture between us ! ”

“ But what friends ? It's a lover, I suppose. Why cannot you girls speak out, instead of beating about the bush in this absurd way ? ”

“ Perhaps you might call him a lover ! ” replied Joan, almost in a whisper.

“ And what right has he to interfere with your business arrangements, I should like to know ? If he were your husband, it would be a different thing ; but a lover—of whom I dare say you have a dozen, if the truth were told—what possible authority can he have over you ? Tell him to go to the devil ! ”

“ I can't, my lord ; indeed I can't ! ” pleaded Joan. “ I could not go with any satisfaction to myself, if I felt I should offend my best friends by doing so. But if you will let me find a substitute for you, just to do your shorthand and typing on this Egyptian trip, I shall be ready and grateful to take up my work again as soon as you return to England ! ”

“ No, you won't ! ” said Lord Mauleverer,

who was ruffled by the girl's obstinacy. "If you leave me just as I want your services most you leave me altogether—mind that. Having a new secretary will give me a lot of bother and worry, and when I've got accustomed to her, I shall not change again in a hurry! You don't seem to consider, Miss Trevor, that many people would have considered that paying all your expenses to Egypt and back in addition to your regular salary, would have been quite equivalent to your services; but I offered you a bonus because I like you, and wished to make you a little present."

"But I *have* considered it," interrupted Joan, eagerly. "I thought it was most generous of you, Lord Mauleverer, and I fought against the idea of breaking my word till I was tired of arguing the matter; but—but—it will have to be. I cannot quarrel with my friends, for the sake of money; and so, although I hate to say it, you must——"

"Very well, very well!" said her employer, testily. "Have your own way; but don't come to me for any more work. You will keep on, I suppose, till I start, and just initiate the new girl into some of my crotchety ways, and then we will part!"

"Of course I will!" replied Joan, heartily. "I will do anything in my power to show my gratitude to your lordship for all your past kindness to me, and you will give me a few

lines, I am sure, to help me to find another situation."

Lord Mauleverer left his position and approached Joan's writing-table.

"My dear child!" he said, almost affectionately; "after all, *why* should you work like this? Whilst you have been in my house, I have regarded it as half play, and I knew you would be well protected and cared for; but, now that you have elected to leave me, why not go back to General Steele, and live at home like a lady?"

"I am not the less a lady because I choose to be independent and earn my living," said Joan, proudly.

"Perhaps not! But where is the necessity?"

"There is no positive necessity, my lord; but it is a life far more to my liking. You have spoken so kindly to me, that I do not mind telling you the truth. I left my grandfather's house because I was unhappy there. He is a man of irascible and ungoverned temper; a domestic martinet, who expects his family to be drilled like so many soldiers to obey him in all things. I had no freedom of action or conscience, and I like to have both. My will was always clashing with that of my grandfather, so I determined to go out into the world and earn my own living, and we are better friends now than we have ever been

before. And that is my history, Lord Mauleverer. Not much in it, you see, after all?"

"A great deal too much for a delicately reared young lady like yourself," was his reply; "and though your refusal to go to Egypt has considerably put me out, I am glad to see that you have prudence as well as cleverness to guide you through life. I wish I could mitigate the evils with which poverty may surround you. Is it possible that General Steele does not make you a suitable allowance?"

"Oh no. He steadfastly refuses to give me anything; but he sometimes tips me a bank-note when I've been extra good. You need have no fear for me, Lord Mauleverer. I think I shall always be able to make my way through the world."

"Perhaps, so long as you retain your buoyant health and spirits; but there may come a day when you lose them. Would it not be a comfort in that case to feel that want could never touch you whatever might happen?"

Joan looked up into the old man's face with surprise; she could not imagine what he was going to say next; but meeting his look of compassionate concern, she answered hastily—

"Oh, I shall get along all right, never fear," and resumed her typing.

"But one moment, Miss Trevor. I suppose you regard me as a very old man, and in comparison with yourself, I am of course old; still

I am young enough to appreciate beauty and youth in others, and to wish to keep them always beside me. I am fond of you, Miss Trevor. This proposed separation has taught me, that outside of the use you have been to me, there has been another and a stronger feeling. Will you let me make you another offer to accompany me to Egypt, not as my secretary, but—*my wife?*”

The proposal came so suddenly and unexpectedly to Joan, that she was completely dumfounded, and could only bend her head down over her machine, whilst the blood poured into her face and rose to the very parting of her hair. What was she to answer? Oh, Larry, Larry! what *was* she to say?

“Have you nothing to say to me, then?” demanded Lord Mauleverer, with the humility which love invariably teaches us.

“Oh yes, my lord!” cried the girl at last. “A thousand words if you will, but not one which could express the pride and gratitude which I feel at the honor you have done me. But it cannot be. Indeed—indeed it cannot.”

“I am too old. You don’t like me well enough!” said Lord Mauleverer.

“It is not that,” replied Joan, as she caught his hand and pressed it. “But I am already engaged to be married. It is a secret, which I particularly wish kept from my family; but I confide it to your lordship, not only because

I feel it will be safe with you, but also, because without revealing it, I could never make you understand the insuperable obstacle that stands between us !”

“And you are sure this man will marry you ?”

“I am quite—*quite* sure !”

“Then I hope you will be very happy with him, my child, and if ever I can assist you or him in any way, come and ask me. Will you promise ?”

“Yes, I promise !” said Joan, as she dashed a tear from her eye. “And now, your lordship will let me stay with you to the last—won’t you ?—and help you all in my power, and if you will allow me, I believe I can procure you a secretary to go to Egypt, who shall be quite as well up to her work, and perhaps more so, than myself ?”

“Ah, Miss Trevor, I am afraid you have spoilt me for secretaries in the future. You may get me as ugly an old woman as you can find. I shan’t care !”

As Joan returned home that day, she felt rather nasty with Larry than otherwise for having put such a spoke in her wheel. True that she had refused Lord Mauleverer’s offer solely on his account—that she had lain awake half the night crying over the quarrel that had parted them ; and that she had quite made up her mind that nothing should induce her to go

to Egypt ; still, woman-like, she could not help indulging a grudge against the selfishness (as she deemed it) which had demanded such a sacrifice on her part. Now that she saw all she had lost, she reviled Larry as the cause. Had he not made this ridiculous fuss over the Egyptian business, Lord Mauleverer would never have confessed his wishes concerning her, and she would not have been at the pain of refusing him. She had lost everything, she told herself angrily ; not only her trip but her appointment, for of course, after Lord Mauleverer's proposal, it would be impossible for her to continue working at his house, even if he had wished to extend her engagement after his return. So now she had to look out for another secretaryship, and perhaps be months out before she found it—all through Larry again ! Well, he could hardly fail to visit her that evening after his rude behavior of the night before, and she hoped he would appreciate what she had given up for his sake, and reward her accordingly. She sat up late, expecting her husband ; but he never came, and the next morning dawned to find her still more languid and headachey, and with redder rims to her eyelids than before. Larry evidently meant to pay her out for her opposition to his will ; but if he went too far, she would show him that she would *not* give in—she would go to Lord Mauleverer and ask him to take her

back, spite of anything that might accrue from it ;—and she only wished that she hadn't been such a fool as to tie herself up as she had done, or she would have married him straight away and paid Master Larry out for his ill-temper and obstinacy. The next day passed still more dully than the last. Mauleverer, naturally, having received his quietus, did not feel like engaging in lively conversation with his secretary ; indeed, after having pointed out to her what he wanted done, he had pleaded important business and left the house, not returning till her hours of work were over. But Joan was too much wrapped up in her own troubles to care about those of her employer. We are all selfish when our hearts are bleeding. When the time for breaking off work came, she tossed her papers to one side, and hastened into the street. It was impossible but that she *must* hear of or see Larry that evening. Marriage, though rational, imposed a certain amount of duty upon the contracting parties. And sure enough, when she entered the hall of the *suite* of chambers, there was a letter in the familiar handwriting awaiting her in the rack. She seized it as a cat would seize a mouse, and ran upstairs before she had the courage to open it.

“ Dear old Larrikins ! ” she thought, as she kissed the writing on the envelope. “ I bet he's as sorry as I am by this time, and when he

hears what I have done, he'll be sweeter to me than ever."

She tore the letter open ; it only contained a few lines.

" MY DEAR JOAN,

" Since you prefer your liberty to your husband, I am going to rid you of my presence or my advice. I have just accepted an appointment as private secretary to General Chamberlayne, and start for the Soudan to-night. By the time you receive this I shall be at Southampton. I only regret I cannot set you as completely free as you would wish to be. Yours sincerely,

" LAWRENCE O'DONNELL."

Having read this letter once through, Joan put the piece of paper on the table before her, and smoothed it out in a mechanical manner with her hands. Had any one taken a hammer and struck her on the back of her head, it could not have stunned her more effectually than the reception of this news had done. For a few moments she could neither think nor understand. The first action of which she was capable was to push the hair off her brow as though it weighed it down, and peruse the words which her husband had written again. Then, for the first time, she seemed to comprehend them. Larry was gone—gone to the

Soudan to be killed, perhaps, by shot or fever—gone to leave her all alone in her anxiety and despair! Oh, it was impossible, it must not be; she would rather confess to their marriage at once, than submit to such a thing! What was money—what was anything, compared to this awful thought that Larry was going into the midst of danger that might separate them forever? It must be stopped—prevented—this mad proposal on his part! She would wire to him at once, and without considering whether it would be futile or otherwise, Joan did in effect rush off, then and there, to the nearest telegraph office and thence despatch an agonizing message, which ran thus: "For God's sake come back to me!" and only remembered when asked for the address to which it was to be sent, that she had none to give. She reached home again in despair. It was all of no use; Larry had said, "By the time you receive this, I shall be at Southampton." How would it have been possible for her message to reach him in time, even had she known where to send? Of course, all his arrangements had been made, and he could not honorably back out of an accepted appointment! He had lost no time, Joan thought bitterly, in taking her at her word! He must have been very eager to break the connection between them to have seized upon the first possible opportunity, to put hundreds of miles between

them. Perhaps, she said to herself with feminine jealousy, there was some other woman who had set Larry's heart against her, and he was glad of his freedom so that he might bestow it elsewhere. But her husband's conduct was too slight a thread for this unworthy suspicion to hang upon her long. Remembrance of all the unkind and cruel words with which she had assailed him two days before came rushing back upon her mind, and after a while Joan laid her head down upon the table and gave vent to a wild burst of grief, which left her worn-out, spent, and good for nothing.

Where was all her pride and independence then? Washed away by a torrent of tears, such as any little vulgar milkmaid might have shed, whose young man had gone a-shearing in the next county. When she dragged herself up from her lowly position at last and regarded her countenance in the mirror, she thought she had never met such a pale, drenched, sodden-looking face before. Her dark hair was out of curl, and hung over her forehead like that of a Skye terrier just out of the water; her eyelids were so swollen that her eyes had almost disappeared, and her mouth drooped at the corners as if she were taken with a mortal fear. There was very little of bonny, light-hearted, independent Joan Trevor left about her.

"And this is what we reduce ourselves to,

for the sake of a man !” she murmured, as she contemplated the reflection of her woe-begone visage. “And are they worth it, after all ? What fools we women are ! Here have I been congratulating myself all my life that I am stronger and wiser and less impulsive than the rest of my sex, and the first disappointment I receive knocks me over like this. Ah, well, I shall have got over it by to-morrow. I managed to live till twenty-two, without Mr. Larry O'Donnell, and he shall see that I can live on till forty-two, in the same way. But yet, the cruelty—the inhumanity of it all.”

She was just about to relapse into tears, though each one scalded her eyes as though it burnt them, when she heard a knocking at her outer door.

“Could it be—could it possibly be ?” she thought hurriedly. “Larry repentant of his evil doings and come back again !”

The mere idea, though so improbable, sent her flying to answer the summons. But she felt aghast when she came in contact, all dishevelled and tear-stained as she was, with the figure of General Steele.

“Oh, grandfather !” she gasped. “Is it you ? I’m an awful fright, I’m afraid. I—I have had bad news. I mean that I——”

“Well, well, well, what *do* you mean ?” inquired the old man, as he entered the room

and looked keenly at her disordered appearance. "Why, what's the matter! Have you been crying?"

"Yes, grandfather, a little. I—I"—here Joan happily for herself remembered Lord Mauleverer's intended visit to Egypt—"I have lost my appointment with his lordship!"

"Why? Have you been misbehaving yourself—neglecting your work, or something of that sort, eh?"

"Oh no," replied the girl, whilst her grandfather settled himself in her one arm-chair (alas! Larry's chair, as it had come to be considered); "but he is going to Egypt for a month or six weeks on some business connected with the Government, and he asked me to go with him; but I couldn't. You see, grandfather, I thought it better not—I thought you might not consider it *convenable*, as he has no wife and so—and so he has to get another secretary and I have lost my work."

Joan's explanation was intermingled with so many gasping sobs and efforts to get out her words, that the general turned round in his seat and regarded her curiously.

"But if so, why all this to-do about it?" he inquired. "You've done quite right in refusing to go. It would have been a most outrageous thing for you to do, and I should have been exceedingly angry if you had consented. What can Mauleverer have been thinking of

to ask you, I can't think ; but there's nothing to cry over that I can see. You'll get another engagement fast enough, and (you know my opinion on the matter) I'd just as soon you didn't get one at all ! ”

“ Yes, I know, I know ; but——”

“ My dear, you've done the right thing, so don't let's hear anything more about it. To tell you the truth, Joan, I didn't think you had so much good sense, and if there's to be any loss in the matter, I'll make it up to you.”

General Steele, notwithstanding his tempers, was sincerely fond of his granddaughter Joan ; when he compared her brightness and ability with the sluggish nature of Amelia and the dried platitudes of his sister, he often lamented her absence from his home, and wished their hasty tempers had not clashed so often as to drive her thence. Now he turned round and patted her hand in what was for him quite an affectionate manner, and bid her dry her eyes and not make a little fool of herself any longer.

“ Let me see ! What is it that Lord Mauleverer gives you !—a hundred and fifty pounds a year—and quite little enough, too, for the time you waste on him. Look here, Joan, if you'll chuck up this ridiculous notion of independence and come back to me, I'll make you the same allowance for your private use. Will that satisfy you ? ”

"Thank you, grandfather, a thousand times," replied the girl: "but it is not the money I want, it is the free life which I cannot give up. You can hardly realize what day after day spent in the company of Aunt Eliza and Amelia is!"

"Oh yes, I can—I can!" replied the general, shaking his head.

"It makes you feel at last as if you could hardly breathe—it nearly drove me mad!" said Joan, with a deep sigh.

"Why, you talk like that fellow O'Donnell," said her grandfather; "he used those very words to me the other day—that he could hardly breathe in London. Do you know that he is off to Egypt—gone to join the private staff of my old friend, General Chamberlayne?"

"Yes, I have heard," said Joan, in a low voice.

"I was glad to be able to serve the young fellow, for I have taken quite a liking to him, and he came to me the day before yesterday in an awful state. I don't know what had happened, but he said he was most anxious to leave England, and would I help him, as I had offered to do. As it was, I had received a letter from Chamberlayne only a few days before, asking me if I could recommend him some one as a private secretary, and if possible some one who had been in the country before,

so I despatched young O'Donnell to him at once, and he starts from Southampton to-night! Lucky fellow too; he will get a handsome salary, and have a chance of seeing all the fun. I wish I had been young enough to go myself."

Joan had stood during this speech staring at her grandfather as if she had been turned to stone. As he finished it, a sound issued from her lips that was almost a scream.

"And so it was *you* that sent him away, grandfather! It is *you* who have done this thing!"

General Steele regarded her with astonishment.

"And what if it is?" he demanded. "If the man is a friend of yours, you should be very grateful to me for serving him. He was delighted to go, I can tell you, and anticipated doing some good work with the sword, as well as the pen. What are you staring at me in that extraordinary manner for, Joan? What is this young man to you that you should care whether he remains in England or goes abroad?"

"Nothing, of course not!" cried the girl, as her eyes went roving round the room in search of some excuse for her behavior, until they lighted on her typing machine. "Of course not, grandfather; it is nothing—nothing—only he was helping me to write a novel, and now I shall never be able to finish it!" And the

tears which she could no longer restrain came pelting down her cheeks like rain.

"Oh, *that's* it, is it?" said the general. "Well, that's not of much consequence—not enough, anyway, to put a spoke in Mr. O'Donnell's advancement. You must finish it by yourself, my dear. I'm sure you're quite clever enough for that——"

"No, no, I can't—I can't!" sobbed Joan. "I never will. I'll tear the horrid thing into pieces. How could I continue it when Larry—I mean Mr. O'Donnell—is not here to tell me what to say?"

The old man looked at his granddaughter inquisitively. He could not understand her most unusual emotion. Was all this fuss really about an unfinished manuscript, or was there some deeper motive for her tears?

"I don't think you can be well to-day," he said gruffly. "You are not a bit like yourself. Your aunt and cousin and I go down to the Castle next week, and you had better come with us and see what country air will do for you. Working at a desk through this hot weather has been too much for you. When does Mauleverer leave town?"

"On Saturday week," replied Joan.

"And are you bound to work for him up to then?"

"I promised I would."

"If you promised, you must keep your word."

Well, we'll put off our departure till Monday week, then, and you must come with us. Is that settled?"

"If you wish it," said Joan, meekly.

"I *do* wish it. I have given you your own way up to a certain point; but I consider it my duty to look after your health. Besides, if you have lost your appointment, how are you to live?"

"That is true, and I suppose I must be run down, for I seem to have—lost everything. So I shall be glad to come, grandfather, thank you!"

"There are no thanks due to me for proposing it. To live at Belstone Castle or wherever I may be is your right, as long as you remain unmarried," he added, as an afterthought.

"And if I were, I suppose you would kick me out?" remarked the girl, with a watery smile.

"I should certainly be very much displeased, and consider that you required no more of my assistance, either now or hereafter," replied the general. Then, having risen rather stiffly from his chair, he raised his withered face for the girl's kiss, and said, with what he intended to be playfulness, "Now, why don't you come back to me altogether, you saucy wench, and try to make yourself happy in your lawful home?"

"Oh, I can't—I can't!" she exclaimed feverishly. "I ought not to accept your offer now—if you knew—if you knew——"

"Nonsense, nonsense! I don't want to hear anything more about your aunt and your cousin and your feelings of independence. It's all a fad, my dear—a silly fad! You might have your own rooms and your own meals in them if you desired it, at the Castle or in Queen's Gate; but you're obstinate, like your poor mother, that's what it is—you're obstinate!"

"I know I am, horribly so," acquiesced Joan; "but you care for me a little, grandfather, don't you, all the same?"

The general kissed her cheek for the second time.

"My dear, you are the only creature I *do* care for in all the world," he said; "but that's a secret between you and me. Now, don't cry any more over the unfinished novel or anything else—promise me. And make ready to travel down to Belstone with us on Monday week. I shall look forward to the change with pleasure if I know you are to be one of the party." And then the old man took his leave, and Joan heard his thick stick tapping the stone steps till it reached the very bottom, and she knew she was alone again.

It is to be feared that she did not remember her grandfather's counsels not to cry again.

The brief respite seemed only to have enabled the fountain of her tears to refill itself, for they poured forth as if no demand had been made upon their flow. She had more than Larry's defalcation to cry over now, she told herself; for she saw her ingratitude to her grandfather in a truer light, and felt she had no right to accept his hospitality or his affection whilst she was deceiving him on his tenderest point. What would he say if he discovered that she was married? How often would he ask her down to Belstone Castle then, or give her the bank-notes which he occasionally pressed into her hand? In her present predicament, it would have been the most convenient thing possible for her to become an inmate of her grandfather's house and live there as long as she felt herself welcome. But Joan resolved that it was incumbent on her to get other work as soon as possible. She would not accept another pound under false pretenses. She had begun to hate herself almost as, she believed, she hated Larry. They had both been altogether wrong. It was his secret as well as hers, and until she could communicate with her husband, she must hold it sacred; but then she would divulge it, or part with her own people forever!

CHAPTER IX.

BUT after that first outrageous burst of grief at finding that Larry had taken her at her word, Joan's natural pride and aversion to being dictated to rose in the ascendant, and she set to work to harden her heart against him. For several days after General Steele's visit, she resolutely avoided setting her foot in Queen's Gate. She was too much afraid of hearing Larry's name mentioned, and his doings discussed, and betraying the interest she felt regarding him. She had not the patience to listen to foolish Mealy's regrets at Mr. O'Donnell's departure, just as they were "getting on so nicely together." She should order her to be silent, she thought, and let out the stupendous fact that *she* was the only person who had a right to mourn over the absentee. Not that she meant to mourn, said Joan to herself, she left that sort of thing for women who could not exist without their husbands. and thought marriage spelled a life of "spooning." Thank Heaven! she had freed herself from such mental shackles before she entered into the holy state. Why, what

sort of affection could Larry have for her, if he could rush away in that mad excited fashion, and accept an appointment which might separate them forever, without even trying to ascertain if she had been in sober earnest? It proved how much he cared for her, that he could court danger, sickness, and even death, without saying a few words of kindness in farewell. Well, if he chose to go, let him go; that was the determination at which Joan finally arrived; she had never met the man who was worth crying over yet, and she didn't expect to begin with Mr. Lawrence O'Donnell.

She would spend a few weeks, as her grandfather had suggested, at Belstone Castle; then look out for another secretaryship, and all would go on as it had done before she had been so foolish as to consent to a marriage which had caused her nothing but unpleasantness. So Mrs. O'Donnell argued with herself, and believed in all good faith that she was sincere.

There were a few friends to whom she felt she owed a farewell visit before leaving town, and amongst them were Captain and Mrs. Crosbie. For, strange to say, these young people whose love-match she had been so quick to condemn, had shown Joan more civility than most, and invited her to several gatherings at their mother's house which she had been unable to avail herself of. She had

not sufficient time to be able to pick and choose her days for visiting, so she walked into Mrs. Crosbie's drawing-room, unexpectedly and rather late one afternoon, and came upon the young wife, very red in the face, and rather confused, carrying bundles of mysterious-looking articles from the front room to the back.

"Oh, is it you, Miss Trevor?" she exclaimed. "What a relief! I thought it might be a gentleman."

"And what wickedness are you after that makes you fear detection?" inquired Joan:

"Oh, nothing wrong; but rather unusual work for a drawing-room! The fact is"—mysteriously—"Charley is going away to-morrow on a shooting trip, and I am packing his portmanteau for him!"

"For the first time, I suppose, Cecily?"

"Yes; and there is so much to think of. You see we have no servants of our own as yet, and mama's have as much as they can do; so I have had to look after everything, and sew on buttons, and darn socks for the last two days."

"That is supposed to come within the range of a wife's duties, I have been told," said Joan, rather sarcastically.

But little Mrs. Crosbie took her remark in perfect good faith,

"Of course. They couldn't do it for them-

selves, poor dears! And it is such a pleasure into the bargain. I have almost made up my mind that I will always do it. It is so nice to think that I have had any part in making him comfortable. As I rolled up his socks and put them away, I kissed the place where his dear old toes would go, and wondered if they would feel it."

"Oh, Cecily, how can you be so silly?"

Mrs. Crosbie looked a little ashamed of her enthusiasm.

"Well, I suppose it *is* silly; but it's very nice. Joan, can you keep a secret?"

"I think so, Cecily."

"Come here then," and as she spoke, Cecily led the way into the back drawing-room, where a portmanteau lay gaping for the rest of its contents.

"Do you see this?" she asked, pointing to a folded white garment. "That is his night-shirt."

"How very interesting."

"Now, don't say 'how very interesting' in that way, Joan, or I shall be afraid to go on."

Mrs. Crosbie lifted a fold of the article and brought to view a small packet in white paper, and tied with a blue ribbon.

"You'll never guess what that is," she exclaimed triumphantly.

"I am afraid not. I am bad at guessing."

"It's a box of caramels," said the young wife,

with an excited face. "You must know that Charlie loves caramels better almost than anything; so I thought of putting a box in here, then when he goes to bed to-morrow night he *must* find them, and it will make him think of me. He will remember how much I love him and how much I wish I were with him, and he—he will be pleased, I am sure he will."

To Joan's practical mind, the idea of fanning Cupid's flame by means of going to bed crunching caramels had something bordering on the ludicrous in it; but there was no mistaking the intense earnestness which was portrayed on Cecily's face.

"Don't you think he will?" she repeated wistfully.

"I am sure of it," replied her friend; "and a very sweet reminder into the bargain. But I should think that Captain Crosbie needed none such of you."

"Oh, I hope not—I think not!" rejoined Cecily, brightly. "Only I like him to know how much I think of him, the darling! See, here are all his socks and his knickerbocker stockings; and here are his shirts and under-vests, and these are his collars, and——"

"Stop, Cecily," cried Joan, laughing; "you forget to whom you are speaking. Would you initiate me into all these sacred mysteries before my time? What have I to do with socks

and shirts and all such things? But I think Captain Crosbie is a very lucky man to have such a good little wife to look after him."

"You wouldn't say that if you knew him as I do," replied the girl. "He is so good and true to me that I could never, never do enough to make him comfortable in return. And men are such helpless creatures; if we women didn't look after them and tidy them up a little, what *would* become of them? Now I shall feel quite sure that Charlie will not find anything unfit to wear whilst he is away."

"And why are you not going with him, Cecily?"

Mrs. Crosbie's face grew to twice its usual length.

"Ah, how I wish I could! But he is going to stay with an old bachelor uncle up in Scotland, and the shooting-box has no accommodation for ladies, so I am obliged to stay behind. Charlie wanted to put off his visit; but he loves shooting so much, and it is his only chance this season, so I couldn't be so selfish as to deprive him of it—could I? So I am going to stay here with mama for another month, and perhaps we may go to the seaside together, and then, when my darling comes back, he is going to take me to Boulogne or some other place, and we shall be together again. Oh, the prospect seems like heaven to me!"

"Not sick of him yet, then, Cecily?"

"Sick of my Charlie? Rather not. I think I love him more and more each day we live together."

"I am very glad of it, dear. I was almost afraid your marriage was rather a risk, considering how short a time you were engaged to Captain Crosbie beforehand."

"Yes, it was a short time, wasn't it? Only six weeks!" said the other girl, musingly. "And looking back I seem to have known very little of him when we married. But, given a man like my Charlie, I don't see how a girl can help growing fonder of him the more they live together. For it is the *living together*, you see, that does it, Joan. To be always with your husband, morning, noon, and night—to take all your meals in company—to share your pleasures and troubles—it is the close union that makes marriage such a happy condition, provided you choose the right person. At least so it seems to me. I have been married just two months, and my husband, who was almost a stranger to me on my wedding-day, and of whom, let me tell you, dear, I was a little afraid, now seems the very dearest and nearest friend that I ever had. I wish you were married too, Joan."

"Yes. But the state that suits one woman might not suit another, Cecily. I am rather an independent body, and fond of having my own way. I am afraid that submission and

obedience and that sort of thing wouldn't come up to my ideas of happiness."

"Oh yes, they would, if you loved your husband!" interposed the other, eagerly. "Love would make it all so smooth. It is such a pleasure to obey a man who loves you; you would do much harder things than that, if it were only to prevent a cloud passing over his dear face. If Charlie were to order me to lie down so that he might put his foot upon my neck, it would not seem a degradation to me, for I prefer his foot to other people's hands."

"Ah, Cecily, it would be a long time before I could feel like that! We are differently constituted, my dear child. You like to obey, and I don't; you like being protected and looked after, and it irritates me if any one attempts to guide or direct me. But there is no chance that any one ever will. Be happy in your own way, dear, and let me be in mine."

"Joan, I don't believe you *are* quite happy," remarked her friend. "The lonely life you lead must be so apt to embitter a girl."

"Well, I am not going to be lonely from next Monday, for I am going down to Belstone Castle with my grandfather, and we shall quarrel often enough to keep us both lively."

"No, don't quarrel with the old man," were Cecily's last words, as she kissed Joan good-by. "Life is not worth living without peace; and there are so many things better worth doing."

Joan had been used to consider Cecily Crosbie a fool, but as she walked home from Bayswater, she could not help remembering her words and wondering at the change that had taken place in her since she was married. Was it love or marriage that had effected it ? or was it that constant communion to which she had alluded, and which had made her imbibe her husband's views and opinions on many subjects which she had never considered before ? And there were other thoughts to which the interview had given birth as well. Joan found that well-filled portmanteau constantly recurring to her mind, with its rows of neatly darned socks ; its beautifully got-up shirts, and starched collars ; even the remembrance of the silly trumpery little box of caramels had the power somehow to bring the tears very close to her eyes. They made her think of poor untidy bachelor Larry's Gladstone, crammed to the mouth with his possessions, stuffed in one on the top of the other without forethought or discretion. No woman to see if his linen was fit for use ; to be sure that he had all the little necessities in the shape of soap and tooth-powder and brilliantine, which make up the sum of a traveler's comfort ; to pack his belongings for him ; no wife, in fact to prove herself his companion and helpmeet. She could fancy Larry, with his natural Irish impetuosity, crying, " Devil take the lot ! " as he packed his valise with his foot, not thinking

nor caring what his clothes would look like when he reached his journey's end. And the contrast with Captain Crosbie's traveling gear—and the caramels he was to find within his night-shirt ! All her inclination to ridicule the silly little wife left Joan, as she pondered on the love she showed her husband and which must cover a multitude of sins in his eyes. But it was no use musing on what might have been. Larry had left England, portmanteau and all ; he had gone beyond her reach, and it was all his fault—so she tried to convince herself—that he had done so.

She worked for Lord Mauleverer up to the last, found him an excellent substitute for herself, and met her family at the railway station on Monday morning, with as cheerful a face as usual. The weather, now in the last week of July, was glorious. Joan looked handsome and "natty" in her tailor-made costume, and even Mealy's fat face was improved by her picture hat ; Aunt Eliza of all the party being disposed to grumble and declare the soft summer breeze to be treacherous, as she enveloped her scraggy throat with a feather boa. As she entered the first-class carriage with her nieces, she said—

"I hope you will not object, my dears, to let my poor maid sit in our carriage, but I do not like to put her with the other servants. They are so jealous of my care for her, that they quite make her life a little torture."

"Oh no, of course not, aunt, if grandfather has no objection," replied Joan.

"I don't mind so long as the creature keeps to the other side of the carriage," roared the general.

"The *creature*!" remonstrated Miss Steele. "My dear Joseph, do be more careful. You would wound poor Harriet's feelings terribly if she overheard you."

"Can't help it. Has no business to have feelings," replied her brother, as he ensconced himself behind his newspaper, and Miss Steele beckoned to her *protégée* from the window. Joan was prepared, from her cousin's description, to see an uncouth and awkward woman, but she was unfeignedly surprised when a tall repulsive-looking person entered the compartment, and took a seat at the further end, keeping her face resolutely glued to the window-pane.

"Good Heavens!" she said, in a horrified whisper to her cousin, "is *that* the new lady's-maid? She looks more like a cowherd. Whatever possessed aunt to engage her? Has she ever lived in a gentleman's family before?"

"I believe not," whispered Mealy in return; "and that is one of her great recommendations in aunt's eyes. She has never been contaminated by dining in a servants'-hall and sitting next a footman. And aunt thinks nothing too

good for her. Fancy letting her travel down in our carriage ! Poor Ellis was never allowed such a privilege. How aunt can let the horrid creature touch her is a mystery to me."

"Harriet," said Miss Steele, in suave tones to her maid, "would you like a newspaper to read on the journey?"

"Thank ye, mum," replied the woman, as she extended an enormous paw, encased in a yellow cotton glove, for the paper.

"This is called 'The Young Christian,'" continued Miss Steele, as she handed it to her. "You will find a beautiful account on the last page of how a servant, no more powerful than yourself, Harriet, converted a whole family of thoughtless and flirting young ladies by her pure and stainless example. Who knows but what you may do the same?"—with an encouraging smile.

"Yes, mum," replied the maid.

"I should really like to hear you, as we travel down to the country, tell my nieces some of the experiences of your simple, modest life, Harriet. How, at the age of thirty, you can boast (and it is, indeed, a thing to be proud of) that you have never been embraced by any one but your mother and sisters. There are very few young women with such a record, and you need not blush to relate it. Heroes who perform feats of valor in the heat of the moment, are less praiseworthy than the woman

who retains her pristine purity in the face of manifold temptations."

"I should like to hear some of the temptations above all things," said Joan, whose natural love of humor had been provoked by her aunt's absurd speech. "Do make her tell them! How many young men have offered to kiss her or run away with her, and what they were—butchers or bakers or what?"

"Joan, my dear, you will flurry Harriet if you run on in that way. Let her collect her thoughts. The effect of her untainted life every one can see. She shrinks from contact with the other sex, even in the ordinary routine of life. The idea of men is horrible to her; if it were possible, she would never move from my side."

"How interesting!" said Joan, with eyes full of feigned belief, whilst Mealy was gazing steadfastly from the carriage window, with her handkerchief stuffed into her mouth. "I wonder she likes to sit in the same compartment with grandfather. He's a man; at least, I suppose so; aren't you, grandfather?"

"Joan, I am astonished to hear you address your grandpapa on such a subject. But you forget that *I* am here, and, knowing the strictness of my principles, Harriet fears nothing whilst under my protection, do you, Harriet?"

"No, mum," reiterated the maid.

Meanwhile Joan had been taking stock of

the personal appearance of this rare specimen of the female sex. She had harsh and stubby sandy hair (which her mistress accounted for by the fact that she had lately recovered from a dangerous fever), sly, shifty, small blue eyes, which never looked any one straight in the face, a freckled skin, white eyelashes and brows, enormous hands, with bony red knuckles, and a flat figure. No wonder, thought Mrs. Joan to herself, that she had never been kissed ; the man who accomplished such a feat should have the Victoria Cross awarded him for valor. Harriet apparently did not read the paper which Miss Steele had handed her, but kept her gauze veil down over her face, and gazed continuously from the window, against which she was seated.

"I never saw such a repulsive creature in my life," confided Joan to Mealy ; "she is a disgrace to a respectable establishment, and if she ever presumes to enter my bedroom, I shall quickly turn her out again. She looks as if she were mad."

"That is just what Mr. O'Donnell said !" remarked her cousin.

"When did Mr. O'Donnell see her ?" asked Joan with a little start.

"One day when he was talking to grand-papa. Harriet happened to come to the door with a message for Aunt Eliza, and he gave an exclamation when he saw her, and she bolted

like a shot. Aunt Eliza was quite cross with him ; she declared he had frightened the dear lamb with his bold eyes (you remember what big, wide open eyes he has, Joan,) and that she was so timid she could not stand the admiration of gentlemen—and then he told her he was sure the woman was mad, and begged her to send her away before she did any damage. He said he had had a lot of experience with lunatics, and he was certain this woman had the marks of insanity upon her, and was not a safe person to have about the house. Aunt Eliza was mortally offended. She would not deign to answer him, but got up and followed her sweet, pretty pet out of the room, and would not come back even to wish Mr. O'Donnell good-by."

"And when was that?" demanded Joan, in as indifferent a tone as she could assume.

"The day before he went—when he came to ask grandpapa about the appointment! Oh, I say, Joan, wasn't it a shame of grandpapa to let him go, when any other man would have done as well? I hate him for it, and have never spoken civilly to him since. And now they say that dear Mr. O'Donnell will be exposed to danger just as much as any of the soldiers, as he is determined to be on the spot if there is any fighting. He has taken his camera with him, and no end of drawing and writing materials, and he told grandpapa that

he would make his name by it, or die ! Poor dear Mr. O'Donnell ! It shows the rooted antipathy grandpapa has to either of us girls marrying, for I do believe he sent him out of England to prevent my having a chance. I was growing quite fond of him—and I have dreamed of him each night since he has gone away. And look here," continued Mealy, drawing a gold chain from the bosom of her dress, "did you ever see that before ?"

"Where did you get it ?" exclaimed her cousin, quickly, as she recognized a small blue enamel and gold pencil-case which she had given to Larry.

"It is his," replied Mealy, in a mysterious tone. "He had been making notes with it for grandpapa, and as he left the room he must have dropped it, for I found it under the chair where he had been sitting. I think he was dreadfully nervous at the last, his voice shook so when he bid us good-by, and particularly when he spoke to me ! So I resolved to keep this in remembrance of him till we meet again. It may bring him back to me unawares ; don't you think so, Joan ?"

"Amelia," answered Joan, roughly, "you're a fool ! I've told you before that Larry O'Donnell is not a marrying man ; there is an insuperable obstacle to his marrying ; he is under an oath ; bound to another woman ; and so it's of no use your hankering after him

in this ridiculous manner. You will only lay yourself open to a disappointment! He thinks no more of you than he does of Aunt Eliza!"

But Miss Amelia James, like many fools, was very cunning.

"But how do *you* know all this?" she inquired. "Did Mr. O'Donnell tell you himself that he is bound to another woman? and if it is the case, why does not he make it public? Why does he go about as a free man and talk as if he were free, too?"

"You must put that question to Mr. O'Donnell yourself," replied Joan, with set teeth; "but I advise you to give up wearing that pencil-case next your heart. If you don't I shall tell grandfather what you are doing!"

"Oh, Joan, what a nasty, sneakish thing to say! What harm is it? Are you jealous because I like Mr. O'Donnell? Do you want him for yourself?"

"Be careful what you are saying," said Joan, with lowering brows, "or we shall quarrel, Amelia!"

Miss James had had some little experience of what Joan could do and say if really angry, so she sniveled a little, and, unhooking the pencil-case from her chain, prepared to put it in her pocket instead. But her cousin was too quick for her.

"I will take care of that," she said quietly, as she stowed it away, "until Mr. O'Donnell

returns to claim it ; and you may be sure I shall not do anything so foolish as to hang it on a chain, or put it next my heart ! ”

“ Well, I do think that’s mean of you,” said the disappointed Mealy, as she tucked her chain into the bosom of her dress again.

A short time more and they had arrived at their destination, and for a while the peace and quiet beauty of the country seemed to make Joan lose sight of her trouble. Belstone Castle was a magnificent place in the heart of Warwickshire, surrounded by park-like grounds and well-kept gardens, now in the very zenith of their beauty. For the first few days Joan found full occupation in wandering about and renewing her acquaintance with old places and people. But the country soon palled on her. It was too silent and lonely ; it afforded her too much time to brood over the past, and feed on her own imagination with regard to the future. She would not confess the truth to herself, but she became restless and uneasy—dreaming dreams which she had no hope of seeing realized, and lamenting over the short-lived folly which had made her trample on all her former resolutions and place manacles upon her wrists which might keep her fettered as long as she lived.

In this dilemma, Joan, with the severe judgment which she usually passed upon herself, resolved that in work alone could she hope to

drown unpleasant recollections, and in looking round for it, she bethought her of the unfinished manuscript of her novel.

She had not adhered to her general rule of frankness, when she defended her tears before General Steele, by attributing her sudden attack upon him to the fact of her disappointment at hearing that he had been the means of sending Mr. O'Donnell out of the country, before he had completed the novel he was writing with her. For in effect they had not touched that novel since they had been married. Larry's hours had been so late and far between, and they had had so much to tell each other when they met, that they had almost forgotten the mutual literary effort upon which they had resolved ; or, if they remembered it, it was only to laugh and say that it would keep for a future day. Joan had not pressed the subject ; she thought sometimes that Larry somewhat regretted the hasty act that committed his months of labor to the flames, and looked forward to writing the same story over again with a little distaste, so she had waited until they had more leisure, before asking him to attack her work in real earnest. Neither had she looked at the manuscript herself, since that day when Larry had made such an heroic sacrifice for her sake, and she had rewarded him with her hand for his pains.

But now she took it from her box, and car-

ried it into the park, and sat under the leafy trees through the long summer mornings, perusing it carefully. It came almost as a revelation to her; she had half forgotten what she had written; she read the sentences as if they transcribed the thoughts of someone else, and criticised them in like measure. She had tried very hard, as was said at first, to make her story natural; to show, without prejudice or exaggeration, how it was that the prototype of Mrs. Delamere had fallen into evil courses; how the fatal habit of drinking had commenced in carelessness, and been continued through disobedience and obstinate disregard of all warning, entreaty, and advice.

She had painted it in detail and very faithfully, and as she read it over with clearer eyes than she had been able to give it, during the hurried and excited time of writing, Joan was astonished to find that she had advocated the very virtues that she had most stringently refused in her own person to recognize as such. Her heroine had degraded herself; upset the discipline of her home, made her husband wretched, and neglected her children, all from one vice—not that of inebriation—*that* was the context; but of rebellion against just authority, of confidence in her own strength of purpose without recognizing the right of her husband to restrain her in any way; of the love of independence, and the insistence on direct-

ing herself, which finally led her on, like a boat without a rudder, until it ended by her indulging the servile propensity which culminated in her loss of reason and life. She had actually killed her heroine from the exercise of that liberty which she arrogated to herself as the only thing which could make the married state tolerable to either man or woman.

Joan could hardly believe her own eyes as she read the words. Was it possible that it was she who had written them? And if her husband had read them, as he fully intended to do, what a hold he would have had over her, when she flatly refused compliance with his desire, and drove him out of the country by her implied determination to have her own way! Yes, drove him out of the country, and Joan used that very term in her own heart and did not stop to correct it afterwards.

The discovery greatly subdued her. It made her think that if a woman chose a man to be her life-companion, although it gave him no right to bully or ill-use her, it *did* mean that they were to walk together as friends, and duly weigh the value of each other's words and counsel. Her final rejection of Lord Mauleverer's offer to accompany him to Egypt proved that second thoughts had taught her that Larry had the right to direct her actions, however much she had resented his interference at the time. As she perused her manuscript, remem-

brances of the one he had cast into the flames for her sake, kept recurring to her mind, and making her think her own more and more inferior at each line. At first she felt inclined to follow Larry's example, and bury her story in a similar grave, but on reflection, Joan decided to begin at the beginning, and re-write her own. She wanted work to do ; here it was close to her hand, and she set about it at once. As she retraced her sentences, Larry's superior phrases and metaphors came into her mind, until she hardly knew whether the book was his or hers. But it interested and employed her, and she spent hours each day in her own room, making a fair copy of her work. Sometimes she would start to find that there were tears upon the paper, and that she had smudged the written words. It made her impatient with her own weakness, and she would hastily brush them off, when she found another sentence perhaps, running under her pen, which bore no resemblance to the offspring of her brain, and was Larry's child—not hers. And then sometimes the pen and paper would be laid aside in real earnest, and Joan indulged in a little weep over the memory of the past.

CHAPTER X.

ONE day, when the family had been settled at Belstone Castle for some weeks, General Steele addressed his sister in his usual curt, uncivil manner.

"By the way, De Crespigny is coming over from Stoke to luncheon this morning, and brings a friend with him. See that everything is as it should be."

This unexpected announcement was quite sufficient to throw Miss Steele into a flutter.

"Dear me, Joseph, why couldn't you have let me know sooner? Mr. de Crespigny and a friend—a lady friend?"

"No, a man!"

"Oh dear—oh dear! Two gentlemen! How very awkward! Is it necessary that the girls and I should lunch with them?"

"Why, of course, Aunt Eliza," interposed Mealy. "However should grandpapa entertain them by himself?"

"Hold your tongue, miss!" said the general. "Yes, you will all lunch downstairs, of course. Let Bilstead get out the best wine, and have the table properly decorated."

"For two *men*?" questioned his sister, contemptuously. "What a trouble!"

"I'll see after the flowers, Aunt Eliza," said Joan. "You know I love that sort of thing."

"And what do you wish for luncheon, Joseph?" inquired Miss Steele, plaintively. "That is, provided it can be got ready at so short a notice."

The general swore a big oath. He was working up for a rage, and when that was the case, his "squinney" little frame appeared to swell like the frog in the fable who wished to be an ox.

"Haven't you got a housekeeper?" he shouted. "Do you wish me to turn cook and scullery-maid to save them trouble? Go downstairs and tell the lazy female who rules over my kitchen to stir her stumps and prepare a proper meal for my guests, or out on the doorstep she will go. Good gracious! one would think I limited the household expenditure, to hear you talk; as if we hadn't bacon-rinds and cheese-parings enough to feed our friends on. You had better go and do as I say, Eliza, or I shall not be master of myself in another minute."

And Miss Steele, notwithstanding her implied contempt for the nobler sex, scuttled out of the room like a mouse with a cat at its heels, and disappeared to weep in the lower regions.

Joan had no such fear. She and her grand-

father had had many a battle-royal in the old days, but she had never given in ; and the old man admired her for it, though he never acknowledged it. As soon as her aunt had left the room, she walked up to the irate general, and put her hand over his mouth.

"No more naughty words, grandfather," she said ; "I won't allow it. What do you mean by swearing at a lady like that ? You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"It's only your aunt," he said sulkily.

"Only my aunt ! Only a woman, like myself. Why, where are all your military manners gone ? Is that the way the officers of her Majesty's army treat the members of the fair sex ?"

"Ah, my dear, when we were young—"

"You behaved as though you were young ; but now you are old, you behave like a bear. Is that what you mean ? Aunt is not a chicken, you must remember, and a very little thing flurries an old lady."

"Ah, you jade ! Why aren't you keeping house for me yourself ?"

"Because you're such a disagreeable, cantankerous old fellow. Do you suppose I would have stood being sworn at like that ? I should have boxed your ears."

"Well, perhaps I was wrong ; Eliza is old, as you say, and has led rather a disappointed life. Now, run along and see about the table-

flowers, and mind you girls make yourselves look pretty for the benefit of my friends."

"What's the good of that," retorted Joan, "when you won't let us marry any of them? It's only tantalizing them, poor weak creatures, and doing ourselves no good!"

"Well, some day I may see fit to take the veto off, that is, if a man whom I approve of, with good family and prospects, comes this way. But no hand-to-mouth fellows, nor penny-a-liners, remember!"

"Are we to marry to please you, then, grandpapa, or ourselves?" asked Amelia, pertly.

"If you don't please me, you can please yourselves without me," said the general, shortly; "and I may say that it would take a great deal, in my opinion, to make your foolish face please anybody."

"Oh, grandpapa, that is unkind!" cried poor Mealy.

"Come, old gentleman, I think it's about time you had your morning smoke," said Joan, pushing the general towards the door. "You're decidedly out of humor and disgustingly rude. The wonder to me is that *you* ever found any woman so foolish as to be pleased by you. Come, Mealy, let us go and see after the decorations, and then look out our prettiest dresses with which to fascinate these *preux chevaliers*!"

Amelia opened her eyes at her cousin's temerity. Joan always seemed able to do just as she liked with her unamiable old grandfather.

The two girls were closeted up-stairs until the luncheon-bell rang, when they descended to the dining-room, and were joined by their Aunt Eliza. General Steele was already there with the visitors, whom he introduced to them by turn.

"Mr. de Crespigny, Mr. Hammond, let me introduce you to the ladies of my family ; my sister, Miss Steele, and my granddaughters, Miss James and Miss Trevor."

By what secret magnetism is it that we are made aware that a stranger whom we meet for the first time is startled, or surprised, or mystified by our appearance ? Joan felt it at any rate. As Mr. Hammond's name was mentioned, recalling no memory at the moment to her mind, she raised her eyes to meet those of the gentleman fixed earnestly upon her, and saw an ordinary-looking young man, tall, with dark hair and eyes ; a small mustache, and a general air of being well-dressed. After the usual formal salutations, the party sat down to the luncheon-table, and the conversation became general. The topic was of course the Soudan war ; when England is at war with any one, nothing is considered of greater moment.

"I don't see any prospect of its immediate termination," said General Steele. "Kitchener will never give in ; one knows him too well for that ; he will return to England covered with laurels, or he will not return at all."

"You are right," replied Mr. de Crespigny. "He has sworn to avenge Gordon's death, and wipe out the blot that rests upon our name in that particular, and he will keep his oath."

"It is amazing the amount of interest this war has roused in private individuals," interposed Mr. Hammond. "Several of my acquaintances who have nothing whatever to do with the service have gone out to Egypt in the sole hope of being in for some of the fun, as they call it."

"I had a young fellow with me the other day who was crazy on the point," said the general—"a pressman of no particular consequence, but who had been a correspondent during the Matabele war, and he was determined, by hook or by crook, to get out to the Soudan ; so I procured him an appointment with my old friend, General Chamberlayne, who wanted an able fellow to act as secretary for him, and this O'Donnell, it struck me, would suit him exactly."

"O'Donnell !" repeated Mr. Hammond. "What ! Larry O'Donnell ! Dear old Larrikins ! I know him well. He is an intimate

chum of mine. He's as clever as they're made."

He glanced across the table to where Joan sat as he spoke ; and in a moment the horrible recollection flashed into her mind—she had met Mr. Hammond before (if meeting it could be called). He was the man who had entered the room which she and Larry had occupied at the Hastings hotel, and whom her husband had designated as merely a City acquaintance. As the conviction burst upon her, Joan grew painfully red, and bent her head down over her plate. Her behavior seemed to spur the visitor on to further endeavors to discover if his first suspicions were right.

"Fancy your knowing old Larry!" he continued to his host. "He is one of the best fellows living. I hope he is doing a bit for the papers as well as assisting your friend. For, if not, they will miss his articles sadly. He has so much fun in his composition ; an Irishman, you know, with all his nation's brightness and vivacity."

"He didn't seem very bright when I last saw him," replied the general. "I thought the man wanted to cut his throat or get it cut for him, and when I told him so, he answered that it didn't much signify which way it would be,—all he wanted was to get out of the world by some means or other."

"You don't say so !" exclaimed Hammond.

"Why, we always consider Larrikins to be the merriest, brightest dare-devil out ! I wonder what had happened to the poor little chap to make him so low. I hadn't seen much of him lately—he always had some engagement or other. Let me see, where did we last meet ? Ah, at Hastings, to be sure ! I had run down for a blow, and came across Larry in the hotel, but we had no time for confidences. I *am* sorry to hear that he was down in the mouth."

"I dare say it was only a passing mood," said General Steele ; "in debt, perhaps, or in love ! Ha, ha, ha ! It takes so little to upset you young fellows. It requires a man of my age to look at life philosophically."

Joan sat still, with burning cheeks and agitated mind, listening to all they said, and longing, oh, so devoutly, for the time to arrive when she might leave the room with propriety. But she was not to be let off so easily. Miss James's interest had been aroused by the allusions to Larry, and she was on the war-path.

"And have you heard nothing of Mr. O'Donnell since he left England ?" she asked of Hammond. "We thought him so nice and agreeable when he was here. I hope he is getting on all right !"

"He hasn't written to me, Miss James ; but a friend of mine told me the other day that he had heard indirectly that he was down with fever !"

"Egyptian fever?" reiterated the general. "Then I wouldn't give much for his chances of recovery. It's the deadliest thing possible; very few of our men have recovered from it; and O'Donnell looked none of the strongest to me!"

"Oh, there you make a mistake!" said Mr. Hammond, in pity for the strained eyes that were gazing at him across the table. "Larry is very wiry and strong; one of those fellows who get over everything; I should have no fears for him. He'll come back again as right as a trivet, so don't lay too much on the off chance!"

The grateful look that came into Joan's eyes as she still kept them fixed on him touched the young man. He realized how deep the feeling must be that could cast out the fear which had at first reigned there.

"I *must* speak to that girl alone," he thought; "whatever she is, I cannot stand the look of pain in her face. I must, at the risk of offending her, let her understand that her secret is perfectly safe with me, and that if I can help her with regard to getting news of Larry, I will. But oh, these girls of the *fin de siècle*! What will they do next?"

He resolutely kept his glance away from Joan's face during the remainder of the meal; but he tried to draw her into conversation as they rose from table.

"What lovely grounds you have here!" he said. "Won't you introduce me to them, Miss Trevor? I should enjoy having a stroll through them very much."

"I will take you round, if you like, Mr. Hammond," interposed Mealy, promptly; but her aunt interfered.

"Amelia, I am surprised at you! If any one conducts this gentleman through the gardens, it should fall to *my* share."

"Delighted, I am sure!" commenced Hammond, in dulcet tones, and, with a withering eye; but the general saved him from the impending fate.

"Eliza, Mr. de Crespigny would like to see those engravings of the Crimean war. Be good enough to set them out in the library for us!"

"But, my dear Joseph, I have just consented to show Mr. Hammond round the grounds—"

"Nonsense, nonsense, let the girls go with him. You know I never trust a servant to touch those prints. And order coffee to be served to us there. Amelia, go and look for a pamphlet entitled, 'The Great Anti-Christ of 1854,' amongst the tied-up papers on the top of my chest of drawers, and bring it down to me as soon as possible!"

Poor Mealy sneaked out of the room, like a dog with its tail between its legs, and Hammond saw that his chance had come.

"Will *you*, then, be so good as to conduct

me round the garden?" he said, turning to Joan. "My one great passion is for flowers!"

She merely bowed her head in reply, and walked before him through the hall and out upon the terrace, which was bordered with gaily flowering plants.

"Not here—into the hot-houses," he whispered. She went in front of him as before, but as they reached the shelter of the first house, her burning anxiety could be no longer restrained, and, heedless of consequences as she ever was, Joan turned round, and, laying her hand upon Hammond's arm, said earnestly—

"You did not say it only to please me, did you? You *really* think that he is strong, that he will get over this fever, that he will come back to us again?"

"I *do* think it," he answered. "But have you not heard from him? Surely there has been ample time to receive news at first hand!"

"Yes; but—but we have had a difference, and he—he will not write!"

"Oh, he will think better of that!" replied the other, cheerily. "Larry is not a man to cherish a grievance. He has the kindest, most forgiving nature possible!"

"Yes, I know," said Joan, in a trembling voice, very unlike her usual courage; "but—but we had better not speak of it. Only I

should like to thank you for your forbearance, and—and you will not let it go further, I know !”

“ Miss Trevor, what must you think of me ?” he cried, horrified. “ Of course not. I shall be as secret as the grave. I am only sorry that the untoward circumstance of my visiting here should have caused you any uneasiness. But rely on me—pray rely on me, that what has happened shall be as if it had never been. I have already forgotten all about it. I owe as much to my friend Larry, if not to yourself !”

“ But, Mr. Hammond,” said the girl, hesitatingly, “ I’m afraid I cannot explain matters to you, at all events at present ; but I hope you will believe me when I say that they were not what they seemed—that there are extenuating circumstances, that——”

“ Why, of course, of course !” he exclaimed, anxious to allay her fears. “ You need not tell me that. My dear Miss Trevor, do trust to me, that anything to which I was a most unwilling witness will never even enter my mind again. I have forgotten it—it is wiped out forever—it is as if it had never been. Now, are you satisfied ?”

No, she was not. She knew that she lay under this young man’s suspicion as a light woman—that as far as the secret of her marriage went she was at his mercy—but she resolved not to divulge it until absolutely nec-

essary, and till then she must bear the onus of having behaved in a disgraceful manner. Oh, that unlucky honeymoon ! Would its misfortunes never end ? But her only resource lay in silence, so she answered—

“Yes ! I feel I can trust you ; only pray never mention the subject to me again. You will understand that it is a painful one to me.”

They walked through the hot-houses after that, and admired the exotics together, and talked of commonplace things, but Larry and his doings were not named again between them. The few words she felt she must say to Mr. Hammond were said, and Joan was thankful when Amelia arrived, flushed and panting, to relieve guard, and she could plead fatigue as an excuse for returning to the house.

But her pride had been wounded to the quick ; her humiliation was very bitter. She would not come down again whilst De Crespigny and Hammond remained in the Castle ; she had faced the latter under the pressure of necessity, like a hunted dog at bay, but, that terrible ordeal over, Joan felt as if she could never see nor speak to the man again. How unfortunate she was ! how relentlessly Fate had followed on the false step she had made ! To think that this chance acquaintance, who had peeped into their sitting-room quite by accident, should have recognized her again as soon as he saw her ; that they two, who

had stood face to face but for a single moment, should have been drawn to meet each other in social intercourse under her grandfather's roof ; it was too cruel, too bitter, too unaccountable. What would Larry think if he knew of it ? How would he not reproach himself for having dragged her into a net which threatened to destroy her reputation ? And if—if Larry should by an ill chance never return, how should she prove her innocence without disclosing the whole extent of her folly ?

But at the passing doubt of O'Donnell's return, Joan's thoughts flew to a far worse and more unhappy contingency—that of her husband's reported illness. *How* ill was he ?—only a little, or very ill, or very ill indeed ? She had hardly dared to inquire, and Mr. Hammond's attempted reassurances with regard to Larry's strength and certainty of recovery, would have been made, she felt sure, in any case, just to alleviate the fears his words had raised. But to be left without certain news, to sit there at home and hear nothing, to have to wait day after day, until, perhaps, she read of his death in the papers, or heard of it through a chance word like those of to-day, Joan felt as if she could not endure it, as if no courage, however great, could make her strong enough to sit down with folded hands whilst her beloved—yes, her beloved, foolish as it sounded, she had come to use that

word now—was struggling, perhaps, with the great Destroyer, Death. Oh, why was she not like other wives, who had the privilege of following their husbands wherever they chose, or of weeping openly over their danger, or of calling upon their friends for sympathy and consolation in their distress ?

Poor Joan had no one to go to ; she was supposed not to care for a soul beyond her family circle ; the mention of her fears and her reason for them would have brought down the vials of her grandfather's wrath upon her head, and destroyed all her hopes for the future. And she was in such a state of misery, thinking that Larry might die before he had forgiven her for the scene which drove him from his home, that she might even have risked that, have braved the general's anger, and endangered her prospective legacy, had she not signed that paper with Larry, that promise that neither of them should disclose their secret without the permission of the other, and she felt it was a pledge which she dared not break.

She crept downstairs to dinner that evening, a pale wistful-looking Joan, very different from her usual high spirits and defiant bearing, and tried, in a nervous, would-be indifferent manner, to bring the conversation round to the general's favorite topic—the war.

“ Did you enjoy your talk with Mr. de

Crespigny and Mr. Hammond to-day, grandfather?" she commenced.

"Very much, indeed. That Hammond is an intelligent young fellow. De Crespigny tells me he is in the War Office, and engaged to be married to his niece, Miss Wilson."

Joan thought of the episode in the Hastings hotel, and the two Mr. and Mrs. Smiths, but was too unhappy and forlorn to smile at the remembrance, even to herself.

"I suppose his position makes his war news all the more reliable?" she remarked freely.

"Yes; though the War Office people are not supposed to disclose any of the Government secrets. Still—they will leak out sometimes. Mr. Hammond says that Khartoum cannot stand out much longer. But there will be a good deal of slaughter, doubtless, before it surrenders. And the climate is killing off as many of our men as shot and shell."

"Is it a *very* bad sort of fever, then, grandpapa?" asked Amelia.

"Deadly! Bowls them over by the score, without a chance of recovery in such a climate!"

"What a shame! Why doesn't the Government send them home to England? I *shall* be vexed if that nice Mr. O'Donnell dies out there, and it will be all your fault, grandpapa, for sending him."

"Amelia, I am surprised to hear you address

your grandpapa in such a fashion, and in speaking of a young man, too," came in warning tones from Aunt Eliza.

"Well, if he *is* a man, he can die, I suppose, like other people," replied Mealy, mutinously; "and we shall never get another friend half as nice, and so I say it *is* a shame."

"Hold your tongue, miss," said the general, shortly; "if O'Donnell *should* die, there are plenty of young fellows just as good to take his place."

"But do you think so, grandfather?" asked Joan, in a low voice. "Have you met many men as clever as Mr. O'Donnell with pen and pencil? He is considered quite a light in his profession, and if his life is spared, I think he will be heard of yet."

"Pooh! You don't call literature a profession, do you?" replied the general, with the beautiful contempt of an empty head for anything it cannot understand. "Why, anybody could write a stupid novel or biography! Now, if he were in the army——"

"Oh, he is such a little fellow? He *would* look funny in a red coat and gold lace—like a little tin soldier!" cried the silly Amelia.

Joan turned on her like a fury. Larry compared to a tin soldier was too much for her.

"What do you mean, you idiot," she exclaimed, "by talking of what you know nothing? Aren't there little men in the Life

Guards as well as other regiments? What does the height of an *officer* signify? I really think you grow sillier every day. One would think you were not out of the schoolroom!"

"My dear Joan, I hardly see what your cousin has said to call forth such a torrent of invective!" remarked Miss Steele.

"Leave the girl alone!" bellowed the general. "She's perfectly right! Amelia grows a greater fool every day. If she can't talk sense, why doesn't she keep her mouth shut?"

"Oh, grandpapa!" wailed Amelia.

"Perhaps I was too hard," said Joan; "but Mealy does make me tired sometimes. But to return to what we were talking about, shall you write to Mr. O'Donnell, grandfather?"

"Write to him! What on earth for?"

"Only because Mr. Hammond said he is ill; and as you got him the appointment with General Chamberlayne, I thought perhaps——"

"Then you thought wrong! I got him the appointment true, and that was more than enough. I cannot keep up a correspondence with every man-jack who is connected, personally or impersonally, with the war! Besides, the letter wouldn't reach him, in all probability. The postal communication is cut off!"

"How, then, do we receive the news that appears in the papers?"

"That's the business of the war correspond-

ents. They sneak about anywhere ; outside the camp, and round about, and pick up the news as best they can for transmission to their papers. But O'Donnell is attached to the Chamberlayne's private staff, and is inside with his employer."

"And—and if he died, would *no one* know?"

"Well, his name might or might not come home in the list of killed—hardly likely, though ; he would not be considered of sufficient importance. A private secretary is only a kind of servant ; he has nothing to do with the nation ; so I don't suppose his death would be reported in the despatches home !"

"It was not a very grand appointment, then, that you got for him, grandpapa?" remarked Mealy, who never knew when to keep her thoughts to herself.

"It was twice too good for him," was the answer. "What was he, after all? A dirty little penny-a-liner ; a press-writer ; a man who——"

But Joan could stand it no longer. She blazed forth in all her fury.

"A man who was my friend, grandfather," she exclaimed, with blazing eyes, "and who was as superior to every one in this family as brains are to bodies. Lawrence O'Donnell is a genius, a man with a heart big enough for two, and a benevolent disposition, that would

never run down his equals (let alone his superiors) behind their backs. You may think you did a grand thing in sending him to Egypt to do the work that General Chamberlayne can't do for himself ; but I consider that in making Lawrence O'Donnell secretary to a mere soldier you threw pearls before swine, and if I had had any influence with him, I would have prevented his accepting the duty ! What do you all know about him, who sit so complacently discussing him here ? Why, he has more brains in his little finger than you have in the whole of your bodies ; and if his life is spared, the world will ring with his name, when you are all dead and forgotten !”

She sat down, panting with her excitement, and just a little afraid of the effect which her temerity might produce.

“Hoity toity !” cried her grandfather. “What is all this fuss about ?”

Miss Steele had risen from her seat in her surprise at this outburst from the usually reticent Joan, but now sat down again, trembling and wiping her lips.

“Well, I never !” she exclaimed. “Joan, my dear, have you taken leave of your senses ?”

“I'm sure you needn't call *me* foolish again !” crowed Amelia.

But Joan heeded none of them except her grandfather.

"I'm sorry," she faltered—"sorry if I have spoken rudely ; but I forget myself sometimes when I get excited. Grandfather, you don't know Mr. O'Donnell—he is a true man. He has been very good to me—and——" She could not get on any further. She put her hand up to her face and burst into tears.

"I believe you're in love with him," sneered Amelia, "or you wouldn't dare speak to grandpapa like that !"

The sneer dried up the source of Joan's tears at once. She rose like a young lioness—went up to her cousin, and having deliberately boxed her ears, walked straight out of the room.

The three members of the family left behind regarded each other dumbly.

"Dear, dear !" remarked Miss Steele, after a pause. "Can it really be as Amelia suggests ?"

"Nonsense !" roared the general. "Send that girl up to her room, will you ? I'll have no more of her damned impudence here, and I'm very glad that Joan boxed her ears. My granddaughter in love with a penny-a-liner ! Do you know what you are suggesting ? Why it would be a disgrace to the family ! I'd cut her name out of my will at once ! I would never see her again ! Joan is too good and sensible a girl for that ; she was only defending an absent friend, which is a right and

honest thing to do. She is a little partial, perhaps, because she thinks a deal too much of the paltry profession of letters; but she was right—quite right—and I won't have Amelia nor any one tell her otherwise! Do you hear?"

"Of course, my dear brother, we both hear and understand; and if you see fit to pass over such a shocking exhibition of temper on Joan's part, we have no right to contradict you; but——"

"Contradict me! I should like to see you attempt to do such a thing! Come, get out of the room, both of you, and leave me to myself! Listening to the cackling of women always disturbs my digestion. Send my coffee in here, and don't let me see either of you again this evening!"

Miss Steele crept from the room, with her niece in her wake, and they sat for the remainder of the evening in dull companionship, not daring to disturb the lord and master of the Castle again.

And, meanwhile, Joan was lying on her bed face downwards, picturing to herself Larry ill and alone in the Soudan, lamenting over the unkindness that had driven him there, to die without a tender breast on which to pillow his head, or loving eyes to gaze until the very last into his own, and tell him how much he would be mourned.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ladies in the drawing-room did not desert Joan for the whole evening. Miss Steele made it her duty to rap loudly at her bedroom door and inquire if she would have some tea or coffee or a glass of wine sent up to her, and repentant Amelia, who felt very guilty when she found that her cousin had hidden herself up-stairs, came more than once to her chamber to beg for admittance, and to say how very sorry she was to have said so many stupid things at dinner. But Joan would admit neither of them. She would not have had them witness her swollen eyes and tear-stained countenance for any earthly consideration. She answered angrily to both appeals that she was reading, and did not wish to be disturbed.

But after a while her naturally kind heart began to reproach her. Whose fault was it, after all, she asked herself, that she was lying there, almost worse than widowed, with her husband dying, perhaps, and she without the means of ascertaining his actual condition, or of sending him a few words of comfort or affection? It was the outcome of her own head-

strong folly, and it was unjust of her to visit it on those who did not even know that she had any interest in the health or sickness of Mr. Lawrence O'Donnell. Besides which, she despised herself for lying down and crying, like a love-sick girl, over the inevitable. If Larry lived or died, she would have to bear it like other women, who were kept in suspense about their loved ones every day. In what was her marriage more "rational" than those of others, if it did not teach her to bear up against the blows of fortune? So, when her tears were spent, Joan got off the bed and prepared to join her aunt and cousin in the drawing-room. She would try to atone to poor Mealy for that vulgar box on the ear, which in the ebullition of her passion she had given her. It was a detestable and unladylike proceeding, for which she hated herself; but Mealy, though silly, was very good-natured, and would easily forgive her. And Aunt Eliza, she was foolish also; Joan didn't suppose she had ever had any brains, but she acted according to her lights, and none of us can do more.

She had certainly behaved abominably to them both. She would show she regretted it by joining them at once and making the *amende honorable*. She dipped her heated face into a basin of cold water in order to erase the marks of her weakness, and after rearranging her

hair, opened her door softly and went into the corridor, upon which, in good old-fashioned style, all the bedrooms opened. It was carpeted with velvet pile, and a footfall on it was difficult to distinguish, especially that of Joan, who trod slowly, in accordance with the depression of her spirits. As she neared the bedroom occupied by Miss Steele, she thought she heard a step within, and concluding it was that of her aunt, she opened the door *sans cérémonie* and entered the apartment. But what was her disgust to find that the only occupant was the new maid, Harriet Smith! The woman started as she appeared, and Joan, imagining that she was only occupied in her usual duties, was about to retire without making a remark, when she observed a peculiar movement on the part of the servant, as if she wanted to avoid her observation. A suspicion flashed into Joan's mind, and she immediately advanced upon her.

"What are you doing there?" she asked sharply, seeing that the maid was turning over the contents of one of Miss Steele's private drawers.

"Nuthin, miss," grunted the woman, "only puttin' the mistress's things to rights." But at the same time she clasped her huge hands over the apron which she had folded back upon them.

"You are not speaking the truth," replied

Joan, boldly. "What have you in your apron?"

"Nuthin', miss!"

"Unclasp your hands at once, and let me see!"

"I was a goin' to clean 'em," said the woman, as she obeyed the order and brought to view a bracelet and brooch of gold and precious stones.

"How dare you tell me that? You know it is a lie!" cried Joan, indignantly. And then her eye fell upon a bunch of keys hanging in the drawer. "Why, you have actually had the audacity to take Miss Steele's keys to open her drawer! Give those ornaments to me at once, also the keys. I will soon learn if you have done this with your mistress's authority or not!"

Harriet began to mutter something about wishing to keep the lady's jewelry nice and clean; but Joan gave no heed to her excuses, and securing the ornaments in their proper place, she hurried down with the bunch of keys to tell the story to her aunt Eliza.

But Miss Steele utterly refused to believe that her virtuous maid had had any sinister design in rifling her private drawers.

"Dear me, Joan," she said, peevishly, "you are enough to set any girl against her situation. Poor Harriet will be afraid to touch my belongings if you attack her in this unreas-

onable manner. Of course she has every right to use my keys in the pursuit of her duty ! ”

“ Did you give her leave, then, to unlock your jewelry and carry it about in her apron ? If you have, why did she try to hide it from me ? ”

“ My dear Joan, you are so hard in your judgments. You must try to be more lenient—you must indeed—and not suspect any one of an act of which you could not be capable yourself ! ”

“ But you know so little of this woman. She may be a member of the swell mob for aught you know to the contrary.”

“ My dear, your want of charity shocks me. I have every confidence in Harriet. Her pure life and estimable character both go to prove that she is honest and upright in all her dealings. And to prove my words, I must request you to ring the bell.”

“ That’s right,” said Joan, as she gave the bell a vigorous pull. “ Have her here and ask her in my presence what she was doing with your ornaments hidden in her apron.”

In a few minutes, Harriet, having been summoned by the footman, entered the drawing-room, and Joan awaited with secret pleasure the moment when she should be brought before the bar of justice, and made to answer for her deeds done in the flesh.

“ Harriet,” commenced Miss Steele, in a

pleasant, suave voice, "Miss Trevor says she found you looking over the ornaments in my chest of drawers, and I want you to tell her before me why you were doing so."

"Please, mum, to clean 'em, mum."

"Exactly. And for that purpose you took my bunch of keys and opened the drawer?"

"Yes, mum."

"Well, you were only in the pursuit of your duty, and you did quite right. Here are the keys," continued Miss Steele, holding them out to the servant. "I return them to you to show these young ladies the perfect trust I have in you, and I beg that for the future you will keep them for me, and attend to my possessions as you may see fit. That is all, Harriet, and you may now go."

"Thank ye, mum," said the woman, and retired, keys in hand.

"Do you mean to tell me, Aunt Eliza, that you intend to let that woman have access to all your valuables?" demanded Joan, in astonishment.

"I do so, Joan. I have not been brought up like the young people of the present day, I rejoice to say, to disbelieve in all faith and virtue and honesty. I flatter myself that I am as good a judge of character as anybody, and can recognize the estimable qualities of the poor as well as the rich. I see a fine character in Harriet Smith; a little rough, perhaps, but

only the roughness of the diamond which loses so much in value by being cut. I would trust her with untold gold !”

“ Well, I’m thankful it is *your* gold, and not mine,” rejoined her niece ; “ and I hope you may not be deceived in her. But, like the Scotsman, ‘ I hae me doots.’ ”

And with that Joan walked to the opposite side of the room where Mealy was seated on a couch reading a novel.

“ Mealy, will you forgive me for that box on the ear ? It was a beastly thing of me to do ; but I felt a bit ‘ at bay,’ my dear, which you must take on trust, because I can’t explain it to you. I had the black monkèy on my back ; but it’s off again now, and I’m awfully sorry I avenged my own bad temper upon you.”

“ Oh, never mind about it, Joan ! ” said Mealy, who was nothing if not good-tempered. “ I felt vexed at the time, naturally, but I’ve almost forgotten it now. Kiss and make friends.” And the two girls’ lips met, and the tiny feud was over. Joan’s fit of weeping, however, had left a violent headache behind it, and she was glad when Miss Steele proposed an adjournment to bed. Her sleeping apartment was not far from that of her aunt ; and after she had closed her own door, Joan heard Miss Steele’s bell ring more than once, presumably to summons the faithful Harriet, whose business it was to await her mistress’s advent in the

adjoining dressing-room. When the bell sounded for the third time, Joan re-opened her own door, and walked across the corridor to her aunt's room.

"What is the matter, Aunt Eliza?" she said. "Are you in want of anything? Where is Harriet?"

"My dear Joan, that is just what I want to know. I hope your unjust suspicions of the poor creature this evening have not affected her sufficiently to make her ill. Why is she not here as usual? Will you ring the bell again and inquire?"

Another determined appeal from Joan's vigorous young hand, brought up Mrs. Bennett the housekeeper, puffing and panting from ascending the long flight of stairs.

"I hope, ma'am, as nothing's wrong!" she ejaculated as she entered the room.

"Oh dear, no, Mrs. Bennett," replied Miss Steele, cheerfully; "only I want my Harriet to come and undress me."

"And why ain't she here?" said Mrs. Bennett.

"That's just what aunt wants to know," replied Joan. "Will you go and see after her, Mrs. Bennett, and send her up-stairs at once?"

"A proper sort of lady's-maid as requires a housekeeper to teach her her dooty," grumbled Mrs. Bennett, as she took her gouty way down to the servants' quarters again. But another ten minutes brought the upper housemaid,

with the information that Harriet Smith was nowhere to be found. They had searched the Castle high and low, but could find no trace of her. They supposed she must have gone for a walk in the grounds.

"A walk at eleven o'clock at night!" cried Miss Steele, who was fast becoming hysterical. "Impossible! Oh, what *can* have happened to the simple, unsophisticated girl? Can your unkindness, Joan, have so affected her mind as to induce her to commit suicide? If any harm has happened to her, I shall never be able to forgive you your harsh judgment. I consider myself responsible before Heaven for that untainted young woman's welfare, and could never look again at any one who had conducted to her self-destruction."

"Oh, aunt, don't talk such nonsense! Find out first if she *has* destroyed herself. She's much more likely to be sitting in the public house, in my opinion. If you continue to indulge her to the extent you did to-night, you will find her capable of taking any liberty with you."

"We do not see such matters in the same light, Joan," replied Miss Steele, scathingly. "Send for your grandfather, please. I must consult him as to having the ponds dragged!"

But General Steele, on being brought out of his bedroom, looking very fierce in his dressing-gown, was altogether on the side of

his granddaughter ; told his sister not to make a fool of herself, but to go to bed ; swore he would not keep the woman a day longer in his house ; and ordered the butler to lock all the Castle doors and let Harriet Smith spend the night in the park, since she seemed to enjoy the evening air.

His orders were consequently obeyed, and Aunt Eliza went wailing to bed, attended to by the upper housemaid, and asseverating to the last moment that her *protégée* had been most shamefully libeled and misconstrued, and that if Joan's unworthy suspicions had been the means of driving the poor girl to her death, she hoped the fatal remembrance would haunt her to the last day of her own life.

Joan retired disgusted from the contest, and with her mind much diverted from her private trouble from the effects of counter irritation. The next day dawned, however, and passed, without any signs of Harriet Smith ; and whilst everybody else in the household believed her to have left her place because of certain disagreements which had arisen in the servants'-hall, where she was detested, Aunt Eliza continued to declare that she must have come to some unhappy end all on account of the doubts which had been cast upon her stainless purity of intention.

"Grandfather, I am going back to town, for I can't stand this much longer," said Joan,

some few days afterwards. "Aunt Eliza throws the whole blame of this horrible woman's defalcation upon me ; and I have enough worries of my own to contend against without being made accountable for hers."

The girl did indeed look as if she had worried over something or other—her eyes were sunk and saddened ; her mouth drooped at the corners ; her whole attitude was expressive of lassitude and depression.

"I don't think you *are* looking as well as you should," replied the general ; "but how will London improve the matter ? It will be terribly hot in your little flat at this time of the year. Better stop on here for another month or two."

"I can't—I can't," said Joan, half crying. "It will be hot, I know ; but I am very happy in my little flat ; and I am pining to get more work to do ; and, in fact, grandfather, I *must* go !"

"Joan," said the old man, gravely, "is there anything the matter with you ?"

"Nothing—nothing ! I am only weary to death of Aunt Eliza's nonsense about that woman. Do you know, grandfather, that she is so infatuated, she will not even unlock her jewel drawer to see if anything is missing ?"

"I'll soon put a stop to that !" exclaimed the general, as he strode up to his sister's apartment, and demanded that the drawer

with which the woman Smith was seen tampering should be examined without further delay. Miss Steele was too much afraid of her brother to disobey, so she delivered him over her keys; and when the drawer was opened, every article of jewelery was found to have been extracted by the innocent Harriet, who had decamped with several hundred pounds' worth of ornaments belonging to her trusting mistress.

"And you have actually been such a fool as to let five days elapse before examining into the matter, and lost all that time in putting it into the hands of the police," bellowed the general, with many an oath, which made Miss Steele clap her hands before her ears. "Well, of all the idiots, commend me to women! Here, Belstead, send down word for Constable Hackett to come up here without delay."

"Oh, brother, brother, no!" entreated Miss Steele. "Pray do not make this unhappy business into a police-court affair. It cannot have been Harriet—I do not believe it of her. Some designing villain must have chloroformed the poor girl, or used some other illicit means to get hold of the jewelry. She was too pure, too unstained, too simple, to have been guilty of such a thing. Fancy, thirty years of age and never been embraced except by her mother and sisters!"

"Fudge!" retorted the general. "She'll be embraced by the darbies now, if I'm not

mistaken. I'm afraid there's a little 'bit of lavender' upon your stainless creature, Eliza!"

"It's all through Joan's meddling in things which don't concern her!" exclaimed her aunt, virulently. "If she hadn't entered my bedroom surreptitiously herself—for what reason I do not wish to fathom—she would not have carried these unkind tales of my poor Harriet into the drawing-room, and obliged me to restore my keys to her guardianship. If it had not been for Joan, none of this misery would have occurred."

"You are exceedingly unjust, aunt," replied Joan, "and I am thankful there is no necessity for my remaining under the same roof as yourself any longer. You ought to be very much obliged to me for proving to you what the character of your maid really was, and if you had been wise enough to keep the keys when I returned them to you, you would not have lost, in all probability, either your jewelry or your servant. The opportunity you gave her to decamp with it was too tantalizing."

"Come, come!" interposed the general, authoritatively. "Stop all that jaw! I won't have any quarreling here. The woman's a regular thief, there's no doubt of that, and I hope that the loss of your jewelry, Eliza, will teach you to be a little more careful for the future what sort of characters you bring into my house, And the creature has been sleeping

in your dressing-room all the time. You may be thankful she didn't cut your throat into the bargain. However, we'll hear what Hackett says about it all."

But when Constable Hackett arrived from Willerington, which was the nearest village to the Castle, he was not alone. Accompanying him was a well-dressed, soldierly-looking man in plain clothes, whom he introduced to General Steele as Inspector Crichett, from Scotland Yard.

"The inspector and I was having a little talk together when your message arrived, general, so we thought it would be as well that we should call to see you together."

"Of course, of course ; very glad to have the inspector's advice on this unpleasant matter," replied the general. "Sit down, both of you. The fact is, inspector, that some thief has decamped with all my sister's jewelry, worth some hundreds of pounds."

"But it was not my maid, I feel convinced," put in Aunt Eliza, who held her handkerchief to her eyes during the interview. "She was a pure, untainted girl, who had never——"

"Eliza," exclaimed the general, in a determined voice, "if you intend to interrupt my communications to the inspector, you had better leave the room at once."

"Aunt, do be quiet, and let us hear what they have to say upon the subject," whispered

Amelia ; but Joan stood on one side in silence. Aunt Eliza had offended her too deeply ; she was riding the high horse, and had no intention of dismounting for the present.

"Well, sir," commenced the inspector, "I have been round about Willerington for some days past on a private business of my own—on the track, that is, of a well-known thief whom we have traced to this part of the country, and I shouldn't be surprised to find that I have run him to earth in Belstone Castle. When did this robbery take place?"

"About five days ago."

"And you did not give information till to-day?"

"Well, Miss Steele did not miss her valuables, to tell you the truth, till this afternoon."

"And how long has the man been in your service, sir?"

"It was not a man ; it was a woman."

The inspector whistled.

"A *woman* ! In what capacity—scullery-maid?"

"Oh no ! Lady's-maid to Miss Steele."

"We must be wrong," remarked the constable to the inspector, in a low voice.

"I'm not so sure of that. But a lady's-maid—whew ! Will you tell me what this woman was like in appearance, sir ?" he continued, addressing the general.

"A plain, ungainly creature, with reddish hair."

"Short?" cried the inspector.

"Yes, and small keen eyes."

"Freckled complexion, broad nose, yellor teeth?" said his interlocutor.

"I believe you're right, inspector, though I didn't examine her very closely."

"I did!" exclaimed Joan, excitedly. "She had huge hands, with red knuckles, and warts, and a flat bony figure."

"That's him to a T," said the inspector to the constable. "Harry Smith, as sure as I'm standing on this here spot."

"Oh, no such thing!" cried Miss Steele, plaintively. "Not Harry Smith at all. She was a woman, and her name was Harriet Smith. You are on the wrong track altogether."

"Lor' bless you, that's only one of his aliases, ma'am," replied the officer. "He's got a dozen of 'em—Harry Smith, Joe Smith, Harry Tabor, William Tarrant; my man's got more names than any other of Her Majesty's subjects. He's a cunning one, he is, too. And fancy dropping on him here! If he hasn't got the cheek of the old gentleman! And as a lady's-maid, too! He's broke out in a new place, Harry has. I caught him once disguised as a scullery-maid;—but as a lady's maid oh, my eye! I never heard the like before!" And the in-

spector and his satellite nearly doubled themselves in two with laughing.

"But I don't understand you," said General Steele. "Do you mean that——"

"That the lady's-maid is a man, sir? Yes, I do; and you'll find it's as true as gospel. As soon as Hackett here told me what he was wanted for at the Castle, I says to him 'That's my man, sure as a die!' And now, with your leave, general, I'll make tracks for London and catch him before he's broke up the lady's jewelry."

"Oh, it's *impossible!*" cried Miss Steele, hysterically. "Stop them. They don't know what they're talking about. Harriet—a man! Why, she attended on me night and morning. She did my hair, and—and——"

"Perhaps he's been a taking lessons since I saw him last, ma'am," replied Crichton, still laughing; "but it's *him*, as sure as I stand here, and by to-morrow or next day at latest I hopes to bring you back your property. You'll prosecute, general, of course?"

"I should rather think so," said the general. "I only wish it were a hanging matter. Nothing could be too bad for the brute."

"Then I'll say good afternoon to you, ladies," replied the inspector, "and go after my gentleman as quick as I can. Harry Tabor as a lady's-maid! Oh, my stars!" And his laughter could be heard all the way through

the hall till he and his companion had left the Castle.

"And now I hope you are satisfied that you have made a fool of yourself!" said the general to his sister, angrily; "insisting upon the stainlessness and purity of a common jailbird, and introducing him into my house, to corrupt every one within it. You shall never choose another maid for yourself as long as you live!"

"But, brother, if you will only listen to me," pleaded the old lady. "I cannot believe it of her; she dressed me so nicely——"

"And laced your stays, I suppose?" interpolated the general, with a sneer.

"Oh, Joseph, how can you?"

"And washed your feet?—ugh!"

"Joseph, Joseph!"

"And received all your confidences, together with your keys—this sweet innocent creature who had never been kissed by man—not likely, indeed! And, pray, did *you* ever kiss the pure creature yourself? I should like to know that!"

"Amelia," said Miss Steele, in a voice choked with tears, "take me from the room! Your grandpapa's sarcasm is more than I can bear!"

"So it is!" exclaimed Joan, decidedly. "Now, just you stop, grandfather; you are going a great deal too far, and have no right to make Aunt Eliza more unhappy than she is!"

And then, as the two ladies left the room, she continued—

“What a horrid old bully you are ! Can't you see that the mere fact of finding out the sex of her dear Harriet is punishment enough for poor Aunt Eliza for the rest of her days ?”

“But fancy a woman of your aunt's age turning herself into a laughing-stock for the whole establishment. So obstinate as she was, too, about this horrible lady's-maid, and, after all, never finding out for herself that it was a man who waited on her !”

“Well, none of us ever found it out, either, though I *did* think I had never seen such a coarse-looking creature in my life before ! But, now that it's over, let us drop the subject. If you tease Aunt Eliza about it any more, I shall desert your colors and go over to the enemy.”

“You have already decided to desert them and leave me for the unwholesome atmosphere of London !”

“I have ; and I shall start to-morrow !”

“And what will you do when you get there ?”

“Advertise for another secretaryship. I shall get one in no time. Plenty of people are coming back to town.”

“And supposing you don't, how are you going to live ?”

"Like other people ; on bread and meat and beer !"

"Joan, my dear, I cannot allow you to leave me in so uncertain a manner," said the general, as he went to his desk and took out a roll of notes. "Here are thirty pounds, just to go on with, and when you want more you must let me know."

"I won't take them," said Joan, pushing the notes away.

"But that is folly. You don't suppose I am going to let my granddaughter starve?"

"I shall not starve. I have sufficient money left from my season's allowance."

"Why are you so obstinate, when you know it gives me pleasure to assist you?" asked the general.

"Because—because——" commenced Joan in her usual tone, and then she faltered. "Because I have not been a good granddaughter to you, and——"

"If I have no fault to find with you, why should you blame yourself?"

"Perhaps I am not what you think I am, grandfather," replied Joan. "Perhaps if you knew all——"

"But I have no wish to know all. I desire to assist you just as you are."

"I won't take it !" said the girl, obstinately. "You shall not have it in your power to say that——"

"What—what?" said the general, impatiently.

"That I boasted I could support myself, and then failed to do so," said Joan, laughing, with the tears in her eyes. "And the more you try to indulge me, you foolish old man, the less will I accept your kindness!"

Then she bent down her head and kissed him on both cheeks, a rare thing for her to do.

"Now, let's say no more about it. I have quite enough money in hand, and can always get press work when in want of more. I am engaged on a very big design at present, which no one is to hear of until completed, and I want quiet and solitude in order to think over it."

"And what may this grand work be?"

"That's *my* secret, grandfather. Oh, I wish I hadn't any secrets from you! but it is the way of the world, I suppose." And Joan ended up with a heavy sigh.

The general could not make her out. He knew that she was an independent and somewhat self-willed girl, but had no more idea that she had any sentiment in her composition than he would have suspected his footman of pining over an unfortunate love-affair.

For Joan was pining, without doubt, and visibly to those who viewed her with disinterested eyes. She reached London, pale, tired-looking, and thin, very unlike the Joan who

had left it two months before, and sat down in the little flat at Chelsea, in the very depths of despair. She had tried by every possible means to obtain news of Larry, without avail. The communication between England and the seat of war was very irregular, and her desire for secrecy rendered it most difficult for her to obtain the information she required without betraying why she wanted it. But she had hardly thought that the sight of the little rooms where they had spent so many happy hours would have proved so bitter—she, who had boasted that inanimate things could never hold any power over her. But the armchair where Larry had stretched his legs ; the table where he had taken his meals on the evenings they spent together ; the type-writer on which she had transcribed his written words, all seemed to appeal to her as if they had been sentient beings, calling out for the friend whom she feared might never see them with her again. She felt as though she were going mad—mad to communicate with her husband, to send forth a few lines across the great space which divided them ; words that might reach his hand, and come as a voice from her ; and yet (think as she would) she could not remember a single acquaintance in London whom she could call in to her assistance.

Mr. Hammond might have helped her, perhaps. He seemed kind and considerate ; but

she did not know where he might be, and, besides, she was too much ashamed of his suspicions to appeal to him. But one day she remembered Captain Hildyard. Larry had been jealous of him, and he had been rude to Larry ; but surely in so sore a strait as hers, she might overlook both those disadvantages, and ask him to aid her. His regiment was stationed at Lewes, so she sat down and scribbled a brief note, in which she asked him if, when he was next in London, he would call upon her.

CHAPTER XII.

JOAN had been working very hard at her book during the two months spent at Belstone Castle, and by the time she returned to London it was ready to go forth in search of a publisher. But she had lost all interest in it; her soul was sick, and she did not seem to care if it succeeded or not; she hardly knew what she had written, or if it were good or bad. Had Larry been with her, he would have revised her manuscript, and assisted her with his experienced advice, and smart amendments.

Now "Mrs. Trelawny," as she had called it, must take her chance; her author was too much occupied with greater losses to care much what became of her. In consequence she sent the book hap-hazard to one of the first publishers of the day—an awful personage whom, under other circumstances, she would hardly have dared trouble with the effusion of her brain, and the great man had accepted it. But still she was not happy.

Hearing that her old patron, Lord Mauleverer, had returned to his town house, Joan

summoned all her nerve one afternoon and set forth to see him. That was another thing which, under ordinary circumstances, she would never have dreamt of doing. In the first place, for a young unmarried lady to pay a visit to a bachelor is an unheard-of proceeding ; and, in the second, when a woman has refused his proposal of marriage, etiquette as well as good feeling teaches her not to voluntarily thrust herself in his way. But the pain at Joan's heart prevented her thinking of such trifles. If the terrible suspense which she was enduring lasted much longer, she told herself, she would be compelled, in self-defence, to make the secret of her marriage known. She *must* learn something definite of her husband ; if she was forced to follow him to Egypt, she would learn if he were dead or alive.

Lord Mauleverer received her card with some surprise, and met her with a little awkwardness, as he remembered what had passed between them. He could not understand Joan seeking him out, except as a matter of business, and her substitute had performed her duties so religiously that he had no excuse for dismissing her. His awkwardness was portrayed upon his countenance ; but Joan soon allayed his fears.

"I feel that your lordship will be rather surprised at my calling upon you," she began ; "but you were kind enough when we parted

to say that, if at any time you could be of use to me, I might draw upon your good nature."

"Of course, my dear Miss Trevor; and I meant it. Pray let me know what I can do for you. Is it a reference? Though General Steele's granddaughter should hardly need one from me!"

"No," replied Joan, shaking her head, "it is nothing of that sort. But when you were in Egypt, Lord Mauleverer, did you come across General Chamberlayne or any of his staff?"

"Chamberlayne! What, commanding the Light Fusilier Brigade? He's in the Soudan!"

"I know; but the members of the staff get ill sometimes, and are sent away! I thought—I don't know how near you went to the seat of war, or who you may have seen who had been there—but I hoped, perhaps, that—that——"

"My dear young lady, I never left Alexandria. I saw some of the officers on their way home—the war is practically over, you know—and the sick have been transported to English stations; but they gave me no news but what the papers had already made public. What is it that you especially wish to ascertain?"

"Is the war really over?" exclaimed Joan, her face lighting up with expectation. "Will the regiments all come home again? I am so ignorant about such things!"

"With the taking of Khartoum, the war

may be said to be over, as far as bloodshed is concerned ; but I am not prepared myself to say how long it will take for us to establish our position there. And even when that is an accomplished fact, some regiments must be left to occupy the place until the regular reinforcements are sent out to relieve them !”

“ But General Chamberlayne's staff,” said Joan, breathlessly ; “ will that not come home ? Won't he send the sick and invalided back to England now ? ”

“ Ah, that I cannot tell you, Miss Trevor. But the *Times* of this morning says that Chamberlayne is moving northward, in order to superintend the erection of some battery, I believe. But I am really so ignorant of military matters, that I may mislead you. *My* work is entirely that of a civilian. But are you interested in any one belonging to Chamberlayne's staff ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Joan, in a low voice.

“ And have you not heard from him ? Communication has been very tardy, hitherto, because all papers had to be carried from the Soudan on camels ; still there was postal service through from Alexandria.”

“ No, I have not heard, because—because he has been ill, and no one has written to say whether he has recovered or not.”

Her large pleading eyes struck right home to the kind old man's heart.

"My poor girl," he said, taking her hand, "I *am* sorry for you. This is the same person, I conclude, of whom you once spoke to me. I am deeply grieved to think I cannot give you any information regarding him. Is he in the army?"

Joan shook her head and murmured—

"A civilian attached to the staff."

"And he has been ill—down with that terrible fever, I suppose? Well, the only thing I can suggest is that you should write to General Chamberlayne direct for information. No! Won't that do?" as the girl shook her head again. "Well, then, I am sorry that I cannot think of any better plan."

"When I mentioned him to you, Lord Maulverer, I told you I was engaged to him, and I asked you to keep my secret—especially from my family. I ask you that over again; I know you will grant it me!"

"I will, my dear girl, with pleasure. What you have confided to me shall never pass my lips. And I can do nothing more for you?"—interrogatively.

"Nothing!" answered Joan. "I must try and be patient, I suppose. But it is very hard!"

"I know it. Had your friend been an officer, his illness would have been reported in the papers, and you would have learned the upshot; but since he is a civilian——"

"He may die and rot out there, I suppose,

for aught they care !” said Joan, with set teeth. “ A war correspondent more or less does not make any difference, except to—to——” Here she swallowed something in her throat which impeded her speaking, and concluded in a muffled voice, “ Good-by, Lord Mauleverer, and thank you for your kindness ! I hope I have not taken up too much of your time ? ”

“ My dear, I wouldn’t have regretted spending twenty times as much if I could only have given you the information you require, or shown you how to get it ! But, as it is——”

“ Good-by ! good-by ! ” said Joan, hastily, as she ran from the room, unable to trust herself to say anything more.

There was a dry sob in her throat as she mounted the stairs to her flat, but hope leapt up anew as she discerned the lanky figure of Captain Hildyard patiently waiting outside her door till she should return to admit him.

“ Oh, I hope you have not been here long ! ” she exclaimed. “ I didn’t expect to see you up so soon ! ”

“ Well, you don’t suppose, Miss Trevor, that when I have the honor of receiving a summons from you I don’t apply for leave as soon as possible ? ” replied the captain, as he took her one armchair, as usual. “ I was only too delighted to think you wished to see me, ’pon my honor, I was. But what brings you back to town so early ? ”

"Early ! In September ?" said Joan. "I'm a working-woman, you must remember—not a lucky officer in a crack regiment, who has nothing more important to do than to lounge about the Brighton esplanade, or play polo in Preston Park !"

"Oh, now, come, Miss Trevor, that's too bad of you, you know ! ' We're beastly hard-worked, 'pon my soul, we are ; it's drill, drill, drill, all the week, and only an occasional hour of pleasure, such as you have given me now, to lighten it !"

Then Joan remembered the purpose for which alone she had wished to see the gentleman before her, and wondered if she should make an enemy of him for life by disclosing it.

"But, indeed, Captain Hildyard, I didn't wish you to come up from Brighton on purpose to see me ? I am afraid I had a very selfish motive for wishing to see you ; but you have always been very good-natured to me——"

"Now, Miss Trevor, I can't allow you to say that, for any trouble I can take for you is only a pleasure—a very great pleasure ; it is, indeed—and if you asked me to cut off my right hand——"

Joan could not help laughing, notwithstanding that dry sob which rose every now and then in her throat, as memory returned to her.

"Oh, Captain Hildyard, what a ridiculous idea ! Do you really believe me capable of

wishing to mutilate one of Her Majesty's officers in such a cause? But I'm afraid you will think me very selfish when you learn the reason for which I asked you to call on me! But I never thought that you would have come up to town on purpose."

"That shows you don't know anything about me, Miss Trevor. Why, I'd go through fire and water to serve you, at any time! But let's make a bargain. I'll promise to do whatever you ask me, never mind what it is—if you will reward my devotion by coming and having a little dinner with me at Vérey's this afternoon, and going to the theater afterwards. Will you?"

Joan thought of Larry's dislike of the man before her, and hesitated. She could make a tool of him—in Larry's cause—but to accept his invitation was not to be thought of! Larry would be so justly angry if he knew! So, with feminine cunning, she temporized.

"Is it fair," she said, "to ask a favor of me before you have granted mine?"

"But I have pledged my word to do so!"

"That is very rash. Suppose I wanted something that would ruin you?"

"So long as you paid my price, you should have it."

"Well, I'm afraid you must excuse my going out with you to-day; but the fact is, Captain Hildyard, that I am not very well."

"By Jove ! I saw it directly I entered the room. You are much thinner than you were during the season, Miss Trevor ; and your eyes—those lovely eyes of yours—seem sunk. That just shows you want a little amusement ; something to liven you up ! A nice little dinner and a jolly evening afterwards. I am the doctor, and prescribe the medicine. Say you'll take it."

"I'm like a naughty child, Captain Hildyard, and mean to shut up my mouth and say 'No !' Really, don't press me—not, at all events, for to-day. I do not feel equal to either dinner or play, and my grandfather is so awfully particular, he would make no end of a fuss if he heard that I had done such a thing as dine alone with a gallant like yourself !"

"Oh, come, Miss Trevor, you did it last year, you know !"

"Ah, I was younger and more careless then. Now I feel quite like an old woman."

"Well, if you're an old woman, there can't be any harm in it," argued her companion ; which made Joan smile.

"Grandfather says I'm not quite so old as all that," she replied. "But you tell me what I want first, and let me decide on what reward you are deserving of afterwards !"

"All right ! Fire away ! What is it about ?"

He was surprised to note the languor which

made itself apparent in her voice as she continued.

"Being a soldier, I suppose you can tell me all about this war. I have tried to procure the information I require from other sources in vain. You see I—I am writing some articles on it, and there are two or three questions that puzzle me! In the first place, will you tell me how letters are sent to the soldiers—or any one else—out there?"

Captain Hildyard opened his not very sapient-looking eyes as he replied—

"Why, through the post, of course!"

"But the post does not run through to the Soudan!"

"Oh, no, no; of course not! The news and packets of letters are brought from the seat of war by camels across the desert, till they reach a postal town, and then they're despatched to England!"

"Yes, yes!" said the girl, impatiently; "I know all that! It's common property. But if I wished to send a letter to an officer there,—or any one else—how should I direct it, and where to?"

"Do you want to write to some one, then?" demanded Captain Hildyard.

"Of course! Why should I ask you—at least, I mean I want the information for my article. If you had a brother out there, now——"

"By Jove ! how funny. I *have* !"

"Why didn't you say so before, then ? How do you write to him ?"

"Never *do* write. Hate letter-writing !" said Captain Hildyard.

"But if you did, how would you address it, to make sure it would reach him ?"

"I should address it care of his regiment, I think ; but, as Bob and I never correspond, I'm waiting till he comes back, you see."

"But suppose he never comes back—suppose he dies of fever out there, and you cannot hear any news of him, and no one seems able to tell you what to do ?" cried Joan, in a choking voice.

The captain regarded her with amazement. What was she up to now ? Was it only acting, or did she really want to write those articles ?

"Well, you see," he answered, as he pulled his tawny mustaches, "I think you'd better put those questions to some feller who's been on the spot. A good many of them have come home, you know. Why don't you ask that feller I met once at your place—what d'ye call him ?—a writing feller—O'Donnell something—Lawrence O'Donnell ; that's it. Why not ask him ? You seemed very chummy, to me."

"Ask *whom* ?" said Joan, with emphasis, turning her startled eyes upon him.

"Your friend O'Donnell ; he went out

there with Chamberlayne's staff, so I understood him to say."

"You saw him before he started, then?"

"Not a bit of it. Saw him last week in the Strand. We met in the Gaiety bar. Didn't you know he'd been out? Ill into the bargain—looked as white as a tallow candle; but says he's all right again now."

"Lawrence O'Donnell in London!" repeated Joan, slowly. "Are you sure you are not mistaken? I have never heard of his return!"

"He *has* returned, though, all alive and kicking. Wonder he hasn't come up here to report himself. He spoke of you, too, and asked how you were, and I told him that I hadn't seen you for a month of Sundays. He could tell you all about this Soudan business for he was full of it, and Northgate has engaged him to write a series of papers about it; so you had better get yours in print at once, for fear he should take the wind out of your sails. And come and dine with me first, so as to fortify yourself against the exertion, eh?"

Joan could not answer; her brain was in a whirl. Her complexion had changed its dead white hue for a vivid crimson; her cheeks, but a short time ago cold as death, now burned like fire. She did not know what to say or do. The news had been too sudden; the little room was spinning round with her.

Larry in London ! He, over whose possible fate she had been weeping for weeks and months past, had returned home alive and well, and had not thought it worth while to let her know that he was close at hand. These weary months of absence and estrangement, then, had not had the power to make him lament over the sad quarrel that had parted them ; while she had been dreading each day to hear that he was lost to her forever, he had been content to drink with chance acquaintances—even with the man he had professed to scorn—and to ask intelligence from him of her—his wife—as if she were indeed nothing to him but a name !

She could hardly believe it ; yet there sat the man who had assured her it was true, who had talked and laughed with Larry, who had no motive on earth for deceiving her in the matter.

At last, when she felt she could trust herself to speak, she said, in a quivering voice—

“ I—can—hardly—believe what you tell me, Captain Hildyard. It was my grandfather, General Steele, who procured Mr. O'Donnell his appointment with Chamberlayne's staff ; he would surely have let him know if he had come back again. And Lord Mauleverer told me this afternoon that General Chamberlayne was moving northward with his

regiment, and might not be in England for some time to come ; and——”

“ Oh yes, O'Donnell told me as much. They sent him back, poor devil, because he had had fever badly, and wasn't any more use, I suppose.”

“ But his family—why should he not have written to his family ? ” inquired Joan, unsteadily.

“ Can't tell you that, Miss Trevor. Don't know his family. But these Bohemians are very loose fish, you know. But you may take my word for it that your friend O'Donnell was in the Gaiety bar last week, flirting with the barmaids like steam. One of them showed me a bracelet made of scarabei or some such outlandish Egyptian curiosity, which he had given her. No mistake about it, I assure you ! ”

Something in that last speech seemed to have steadied the quavering in the girl's voice, and dried up the emotion which she had been so afraid of giving vent to. Larry giving bracelets of scarabei to Gaiety barmaids ! That idea acted as a tonic on her failing nerves. She drew herself up stately, as she said—

“ Thank you, Captain Hildyard ; but I have no wish to hear any more of Mr. O'Donnell's public-house amourettes. Pray let us talk of something pleasanter.”

“ By Jove ! so we will,” replied her companion ; “ let's talk of our little dinner. You said

if I told you what you wanted, you would decide on the reward afterwards, didn't you ?”

“Of course I did ; and, if you really wish it I will dine with you and go to the theater,” cried Joan, in quite a different voice, it sounded so animated and yet so hard. “Hang grandfather, and all the rest of them ! Why shouldn't I enjoy myself as well as other people, eh, Captain Hildyard ?”

“Why not, indeed ?” replied the captain, who was delighted with her unexpected acquiescence. “You *are* good, Miss Trevor, and do me more honor than I ever hoped to attain.”

“Well, how much time will you give me to beautify ?” continued Joan, in the same tone. “It is just six o'clock. May I have half an hour ?”

“You can have as long as you like ; but the sooner you return the better for me.”

“Now, don't talk nonsense, please ! You know I never had much opinion of men's compliments. There is the newspaper ; and if you would like a brandy and soda, you will find one in the cellaret. So make yourself happy till I come back again !”

She darted into her bedroom as she spoke, and commenced in a wild excited manner to turn over the contents of her drawers, finally selecting a smart French blouse and hat which she had bought with no thoughts but those of Larry's approval in her brain. But all the time

she was feverishly buttoning her dress, and coiling afresh her luxuriant hair, a little demon seemed to be whispering in her ear over and over again, "Larry in England ;" "Larry in London ;" "Larry at the Gaiety bar, condescending to flirt with vulgar barmaids, to give them presents, when it is not worth his while to let me know that he is here. Oh, my God ! is it all over between us, then ? But I won't give way ; I won't—I *won't* ! To think of his giving presents to barmaids—my husband ! Oh, how right I was to condemn all marriage ! What does it amount to ? What a fool I was to think that he would prove to be better or truer than other men !"

But though such thoughts flew with rapidity through her over-excited brain, she showed no trace of having passed through such a phase of feeling when she rejoined Captain Hildyard. She possessed a wonderful power of repression, and she re-entered the sitting-room, looking smart, gay, and full of anticipation.

"Here I am, you see," she said ; "and I hope you approve of my appearance."

"You are perfect," replied her friend, "those drooping feathers suit your style of beauty exactly."

"Oh, come, Captain Hildyard ; no exaggeration, please. I never was a beauty in the eyes of my greatest admirer. Fresh, if you like, and attired with good taste, but not beautiful."

"That's according to one's ideas, I suppose," replied the captain, as they prepared to descend to the street; "but *I* call you so, if no one else does."

"That's a very pleasant sop for Cerberus, anyway," rejoined Joan, laughing; "so I shall make the most of it—for this evening, at all events."

She maintained the same appearance of high spirits during the dinner that followed, conscious the while that she would have to pay heavily for her efforts, when she found herself once more alone in her empty little flat.

After dinner the discussion was as to where they should spend the evening. Hildyard suggested one or two theaters where much-talked-of pieces were running, but Joan found them all too melancholy.

"For goodness' sake, don't make me cry!" she exclaimed. "There was enough of that sort of thing at Belstone Castle whilst I was there. Only fancy, Captain Hildyard, my old aunt had a lady's-maid, a horrid-looking woman, over whom she made an absurd fuss, because she said she was so simple and pure, and had never been kissed by a man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the captain.

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed Joan, in an excited manner greatly at variance with her usual demeanor. "As if we hadn't all been kissed on occasions, eh, Captain Hildyard? Well,

this simple creature, as you may anticipate, decamped one fine day with all my aunt's valuables, and when the police were put on her track they found she was a *man*—a well-known thief who had been convicted several times before. I had a most amusing letter from my cousin, Miss James, about it this morning. Poor Aunt Eliza would not believe the awful truth until the police had actually caught the thief and confronted her with him. It must have been a ludicrous sight ; I do wish I had been there ; but Amelia writes that aunt has been in hysterics ever since."

"Can't stand hysterics ; can you ?" said Captain Hildyard. "Such screeching and screaming ! Never heard a woman in them but once, and never want to again. I shouldn't think *you* ever indulged in such a thing, Miss Trevor, eh ?"

"Hysterics ! I should rather think not. What is there in this world worth going into hysterics over ? Nothing that I have ever met with. But I prefer lively exhibitions to melancholy ones."

"What do you say to a music-hall, then ? Suppose we try the Paradise ? I hear they've got some lovely 'turns' on there now—animated pictures, you know, and all that sort of thing."

Joan had never entered a music-hall in her life ; she had been brought up to believe they were not intended for gentlewomen, and her

husband had steadily refused to take her to one. But now, what did it signify? Her life was over—all that was worth calling life in it—so Joan told herself; and why shouldn't she spend what was left in the way that pleased her best? The champagne which Captain Hildyard had forced upon her, had done its work in flushing her cheeks and brightening her eyes, and the feeling in her breast was one of desperation—" *Vogue la galere!*" she cried to herself. Larry was gone—everything was gone. What signified what she did or said? Had she been a free woman that evening, she would have led Captain Hildyard on to make her a proposal of marriage, and accepted him. As it was, *she didn't care*—about the worse condition a high-spirited woman can fall into.

She agreed at once to accompany her companion to the Paradise—told him that to visit a music-hall had been the ambition of her life—and jumped into the cab he called for her, as if she had not a single care in the world. Captain Hildyard was enchanted; he had not known that she had so much pluck or "go" in her, and looked forward to passing many evenings in such pleasant company. But when Joan found herself in the Paradise, where she was expected to be amused and not to talk, the same series of sentences which had driven her half crazy whilst dressing began to pass in review before her again. She hardly

knew what was taking place upon the stage ; men, with tow wigs and plaid trousers, appeared, and sang senseless songs upon vulgar subjects, without arresting her attention ; and women, all wearing the same flaxen wigs in curls, and attired in pinafores, which added to, instead of detracting from, their age, came on and made dirty innuendoes, that were received with vociferous applause by such of the audience as could understand nothing more refined or poetical ; but Joan Trevor's quick intellect and sharp memory could not have recalled one of the subjects they discoursed upon the following day. She sat there in a dim mist, through which figures appeared and disappeared like phantoms in a dream, whilst the demon voice sounded in her ears, " Larry in England !—Larry in London ! "—and yet not a line, not a word of remembrance or greeting for her who had mourned him as dead. But all of a sudden she was rudely wakened from her reverie. She had heard, without hearing (if one may use such a term), several members of the audience moving about, and one or two people seated near her had got up and left the hall ; but suddenly there was a general stir, and the alarming whisper of " Fire " ran through the house.

" What is it ? " asked Joan, in a dazed voice, of her companion. " Anything wrong ? "

" No, no ! " he answered hurriedly, though

he rose himself. "Keep your seat, Miss Trevor, whatever you do. It is only a false alarm, but you may be pushed about if you join the crowd. What idiots they are," he continued, as he turned and surveyed the throng, "making a disturbance for nothing !"

But presently, as the hall had nearly emptied, Joan remarked—

"I think you had better go and see what is the matter, Captain Hildyard. If it were a false alarm, surely they would come back ;" and as she spoke the curtain was lowered in the middle of a song, and a volume of smoke poured over the building.

"Come on !" cried a stranger, pushing his way past them. "What are you staying there for ? Can't you see the place is on fire ?"

Then Captain Hildyard became much alarmed, and seized Joan by the arm.

"Come at once !" he exclaimed. "And trust to me, Miss Trevor ! I will get you through the crush, if you will not let go of my arm !"

"All right," replied the girl. "I will stick to you as long as I can ; but this smoke stings my eyes so, I can hardly see."

It was true that in one short moment, as it appeared, the fire and the alarm it engendered had spread so rapidly that the hall was filled with a dense cloud of smoke, proceeding no one knew whence ; and the exits from the

Paradise were choked with a thickly packed crowd of frightened people, all pushing and straining and impeding each other's progress in an alarming manner.

"Don't get frightened—don't get frightened," reiterated Captain Hildyard, who was getting dreadfully frightened himself for the safety of his charge; "only don't let go of me!" and he put his back against a broad-shouldered man as he spoke, and shoved him to one side.

"Let this lady pass!" he kept on saying. But he might as well have spoken to the wall. What did five hundred lusty Britons, striving for their own safety, care if a lady, more or less, were trampled under their feet? Captain Hildyard did his very best to retain hold of Joan, and she did her best not to leave go of him; but it was useless. A big drayman saw his way to shove between them, and, with his burly back, separated the girl some feet from her would-be protector. Hildyard attempted to wait for her, but it was impossible; he was borne on by the mass pushing behind him, and found, to his horror, that Joan was left in the building. As for the girl, she felt too much exhausted and too reckless to care much where she was. The smoke penetrated her nostrils and choked her; the burly drayman's back had bruised her. So she sank down on one of the seats, and laid her head against the

back of it. The fire was gaining on her ; she could feel the heat through the smoke, but she had not energy sufficient to battle against it. If she were fated to die there, she thought once, it would do as well as anywhere else. " Larry in England !—Larry in London !—Larry—Larry ! " and then the smoke overcame her, and she knew no more. When she again recovered consciousness, she was in Charing Cross Hospital, and a surgeon was binding up her right hand.

" What has happened ? " she asked drowsily. " And why am I here ? "

" Nothing much," was the reply ; " only a fainting fit and a bit of a burn. You will be all right to-morrow."

" Ah, yes," exclaimed Joan, starting up in bed. " I was with Captain Hildyard at the Paradise, and there was a fire ! Is he hurt ? I can remember nothing that took place after the smoke."

" Was Captain Hildyard the gentleman who brought you out of the burning building ? " inquired the doctor.

" I don't know. I know nothing. How stupid it seems ; but it all happened so suddenly."

" The fire was soon extinguished ; but there were a few accidents amongst the crowd from pushing and trampling underfoot. You are fortunate in having been rescued from the hall

itself, or a worse thing might have happened to you."

"But who carried me out?" inquired Joan. "I was separated from Captain Hildyard by the crush, and I fell down amongst the seats. Somebody must have taken me outside."

"Yes ; but it was not your friend, who has been here to inquire after you, and was most distressed about the accident. He will call again to-morrow morning, when I told him you would be able to go home. The gentleman who rescued you is as yet unknown to us. His clothes caught fire, and he was unfortunately much burnt. He was brought here at the same time as yourself, and is still unconscious ; but as soon as he is sensible, we shall doubtless learn his name."

"He will not *die* ?" said Joan, eagerly.

"Oh dear, no ; I hope not. We don't kill in this hospital—we cure !"

"I know ; but I should be sorry that any one should die on my account, or risk his life, indeed, for mine ! It would be such a waste of good feeling." She lay back languidly on the pillows as she spoke, and the young doctor wondered what had occurred to make so handsome a girl speak so disdainfully of life.

The burn on her hand, though, comparatively speaking, slight, was painful, and kept her awake all night ; but she was well enough to go home the following morning, and was

glad when Captain Hildyard called with a private carriage to convey her there. She was very urgent before she left to ascertain how the gentleman who had rescued her was going on, and pressed the surgeon to let her hear of his progress, and know if there was anything that she could do for him.

"My grandfather, General Steele, of Belstone Castle," she said, "would be the first, I know, to wish to be made aware if there is anything we can possibly do either to relieve this gentleman's sufferings or to make amends for the misfortune that has occurred to him through my means. Is he better this morning?"

"Yes, Miss Trevor, much better and quite conscious. But he has been badly burned on both arms, and it will be some time before we can let him leave us. Meanwhile, if there is anything which you or General Steele can do for him, we will gladly let you know."

"This is a nice ending to our escapade!" said Joan to Captain Hildyard, as they drove back to her flat; "this is what generally happens to people when they do things they should not! I can imagine the nice row there will be at Belstone Castle when my family come to know that I visited the Paradise in your company!"

"But there was nothing wrong in it!" argued her companion.

"I hope not, unless acting in spite of our friends' advice and our own convictions is wrong. Well, I've always wanted to see a music-hall, and now I've seen one, and I think it will last me for a long while!"

"I'm so awfully sorry, Miss Trevor," replied the penitent captain; "but what I'm thinking about is, who will remain with you now that you are ill? You cannot be left alone, you know."

"Nonsense! I'm quite well again; there's nothing the matter with me except this little burn, which might have happened to me any day. What I am thinking of is the poor dear man who carried me out and got so burned for his pains. Didn't you see him, Captain Hildyard?"

"No. Some one had taken you both off to the hospital before I could get back into the building."

"Poor fellow!" said Joan, softly. "Strange, isn't it, that people you have never seen should risk their lives to save yours, when your own relations, as a rule, wouldn't care very much if you were killed or not?"

She was sitting in her own room by this time, and took up the morning paper which Captain Hildyard had brought with him, and glanced over the pages carelessly.

"Why, here's an account of the fire!" she said suddenly. "Fire at the Paradise music-

hall," and then the light went suddenly out of her eyes. "My God! My God!" she ejaculated under her breath.

"What's the matter, Miss Trevor? What is it?" demanded the captain; but he was not prepared for her leaping from her chair and exclaiming, "Take me back to the hospital! Take me back at once! He might die—doctors deceive one so. And I must see him; I must see him at once!"

"Him! Him! Whom do you mean?" said Hildyard, mystified by her words.

"Lawrence O'Donnell! Look here"—pointing to a paragraph, which stated that "Mr. Lawrence O'Donnell, the well-known war correspondent, who had just returned from the Soudan, had been present at the Paradise the night before, and succeeded in rescuing a young lady from the flames which were rapidly enveloping her, but unfortunately at his own expense, he having been burnt so seriously in the act as to be detained at the Charing Cross Hospital, where he lay in a critical condition.

"It was *he* who saved my life, and you never told me; and now he may die. Oh, God in Heaven—he may die, I say, and I not near him to hear his last words. Oh, I shall never, *never* forgive you," she continued, with the injustice of the miserable, "for having asked me to go with you to that horrid place last night!"

"But I don't understand!" exclaimed Captain Hildyard. "I did it to please you, Miss Trevor, I did indeed; and I consider it a very lucky thing that O'Donnell was there in time to rescue you. I only wish it had fallen to my luck!"

"Of course you don't understand—you'll never understand!" replied the girl, wildly. "But leave me now, pray do, to get over it as best I may by myself!"

"But, Miss Trevor, I don't like to leave you—I don't, indeed," he commenced, when she interrupted him.

"But you *must* go, I say—you cannot stay here any longer. I refuse to let you. Thank you for everything you have done for me, but go now at once!"

The captain had nothing left to do then but to rise and, with many apologies and excuses, to withdraw from her presence. He had scarcely got clear of the Mansions before Joan had assumed her walking things and was hurrying in a cab back to the hospital. She cared for nothing then; who heard of her marriage or what she might lose by it. Her mind was possessed by one thought—to reach Larry and ask his forgiveness for the past. She flew into the presence of the house-surgeon like a whirlwind.

"I have just seen—just seen" she gasped, pointing to the paragraph in the paper—"this!"

"Yes?" said the surgeon, interrogatively.

"And found out that the gentleman who—who saved my life last night, is Mr. O'Donnell!"

"Yes?" he repeated, in the same tone.

"And I must see him—at once, please. Oh, *do* let me see him!"

"But this is quite out of order," remonstrated the surgeon. "Mr. O'Donnell is not in a condition to receive strangers or even acquaintances. He has to be kept perfectly quiet till he can return to his chambers; and besides, this is not a visiting day. I am afraid I cannot grant your request."

"Mr. O'Donnell will want to see me, I know," faltered Joan.

"But, madam, without any better claim than that of your interest in our patient——"

"But I have a better claim—*I am his wife!*"

"What! The wife of Mr. O'Donnell! Do I understand you rightly?"

"Yes, it is true. Go, I beseech you, and tell Mr. O'Donnell that his wife wants to see him, and he will tell you it is true!"

She looked so handsome and so imploring, that they did as she asked them, and in another moment the message came back that Mr. O'Donnell wished Mrs. O'Donnell would go to him.

Joan stumbled after the nurse who conducted her to his bedside in a half-dazed man-

ner, and as she entered his ward, and Larry, enveloped in bandages, met her view, she only sank down on her knees by the bedside, murmuring—

“ Oh, Larry, my beloved, forgive me—forgive me ! ”

“ Forgive you, my precious ! ” he answered. “ If you had really tired of me, what is there to forgive ? ”

“ Oh, but I hadn't—I hadn't ! Only the devil was in me, and I said what I never meant, and I have been so utterly miserable since. When I heard you were down with fever in the Soudan and could not get to you, and dared not tell any one what you were to me, I thought I should have died of grief.”

“ And now you have blazoned our secret forth to the world, you silly child ! ” replied Larry, as he kissed the soft face that was laid against his own. “ Do you know that the news that you are Mrs. O'Donnell will go forth to all London to-morrow, Joan ? ”

“ I don't care ; let all the world know it ! I am so proud to be your wife, Larry. But why didn't you come to me or let me know that you had returned to England ? If you had only known the misery I have experienced——”

“ But who was to guess it of the girl who said she wished she had never set eyes upon me ? ” questioned Larry, playfully ; and then as

she pressed his arm and a slight exclamation of pain escaped him, he added, "But what a Providence that I was at the Paradise last night!"

"Did you know that it was *I* whom you carried out of that horrid smoke and fire, Larry?"

"Rather, my darling! I had been watching you and Hildyard all the evening, though it was quite by accident that I followed you into the hall. But, Joan, is this really my wife who loves me? Is this the happy ending of our hasty separation?"

"Your wife, who loves you above all the world," she replied; and at that moment a nurse entered to say that General Steele asked to see Mr. O'Donnell, if he felt well enough.

"Your grandfather!" exclaimed Larry, in consternation. "Joan, my darling! What are we to do now?"

"Let him in," replied Joan, "and give me the opportunity to prove to you that what I have said is true!"

"Hullo!" cried the general, a moment later, as he entered the ward and saw Joan kneeling by O'Donnell's bedside. "What in the name of all that is holy does this mean? What are *you* doing here?"

"My duty, grandfather," replied Joan, without a quiver in her voice. "What I ought to have done long ago, and should have done, except for a false and unworthy fear. I am

Larry O'Donnell's wife. We were married four months ago !”

“*Married !*” roared the general. “When I've told you over and over again——”

“That I should not inherit a penny of your money if I did ! Yes, grandfather, I have not forgotten it ; but I don't want the money. What I want is my husband, and I was a fool to think I could ever be happy whilst I denied my right to him and his to me, for the sake of a paltry fortune !”

“I hope you may find it paltry——” commenced her grandfather.

“I would not accept it instead of Larry, if it were double the sum,” replied Joan ; and then caressingly, “Now, dear grandfather, leave off talking of money and tell me only that you forgive a deception which I should never have dreamed of maintaining towards you. And that you will receive my husband, and love him as you do me !” and she twined her arms about the general's neck as she spoke.

“Oh, O'Donnell is all well enough ! I told you I had a fancy for him from the beginning ; and as soon as I read of his accident I came up to town to see what I could do for him. And now I find you, you jade, installed here and taking all my good intentions out of my hand !”

“But I have the right. He is mine !” said Joan, with a proud smile.

"Have it your own way!" said her grandfather, shortly. "But what do you both intend to do?"

"As soon as ever they will let me move, sir," replied Larry, "I shall take my wife to my chambers until we decide on something better."

"Why not bring her down to Belstone Castle?" asked the old man.

"Oh, grandfather, may he?" cried Joan, all smiles.

"Well, I dare say we can find room for you, especially now that the fair Harriet has departed, for Warwick jail," laughed the general; "and the country air will set this young man up sooner than London. And if he saved your life, Joan, I owe him an obligation I shall not easily repay. You're a worthless baggage; but I can't afford to part with you yet!"

"Nor I with either of you for the term of our natural lives," replied Joan, as she knelt between her husband and her grandfather, and twined an arm round each of them. "And now, Larry darling, our 'Rational Marriage' has come to an inglorious end! Let us trust that we shall be all the happier for acknowledging it to the world, like less sensible people!"

THE END.



